

KING COUNTY METRO ROUTE 36 IMPROVEMENTS STUDY

Engagement Summary

Updated: Nov. 8, 2023

INTRODUCTION

King County Metro (Metro), in coordination with the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), identified improvements along Route 36 that will shorten bus travel times and improve reliability. Metro engaged with key community voices along Route 36 to share early design considerations. The community input helped us to better understand the needs of people who live, work, and travel through the neighborhoods that are part of Beacon Hill and other adjacent neighborhoods. Metro is committed to involving the community in the project to ensure that their needs and vision help to inform future design decisions.

ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

The project team's commitment to including community members in the study process emphasized reaching people directly affected by potential changes and those historically underrepresented in planning processes. The engagement activities and input outlined in this summary will guide the design decisions made by the study team to improve the Route 36 bus route, so it meets the needs of the Beacon Hill community and beyond.

In this first phase of engagement, Metro shared initial designs with neighborhood representatives and community-based organizations through briefings and publishing on the Metro Matters blog. The following groups were part of the early discussions: Beacon Hill Council Seattle, Beacon Hill Safe Streets, and El Centro de la Raza.

In the next design phase (30%), future engagement efforts will expand outreach to the organizations identified in this summary and the greater community.

KEY THEMES

Key themes heard during this phase of outreach (planning and 10% design) included:

- It is important to **consider the needs of different community populations**. This includes people with disabilities, transit-dependent populations and non-English speaking groups, especially regarding bus stop consolidation.
- **Parking removal** is a dynamic issue in this neighborhood. While there are some supportive voices for reducing parking, a large portion of the community wants a clear understanding of how parking access in the neighborhood may change and the associated tradeoffs.

- **Business Access and Transit (BAT) lanes** are easy for drivers and cyclists in the community to navigate and generally encouraged.
- It is important to **continue coordination with SDOT** on the Beacon Ave S and 15th Ave S Safety Project.
- There are many **transit-dependent populations** in this community.
- **Safety and access** are major concerns for bus riders, which is why bus reliability is so important.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Metro held briefings with three key community groups in the study area between July and September 2023: Beacon Hill Council, Beacon Hill Safe Streets and El Centro de la Raza. Each community group had the opportunity to learn more about the proposed designs, ask questions, and provide input. These conversations helped the team gain insights into their experiences.

The input shared during these conversations covered the following:

- How the community experiences and uses the Route 36 bus line,
- Existing conditions and challenges, and
- Ideas and considerations for potential solutions.

Key feedback from each event is summarized below.

Beacon Hill Council Seattle

- Participants rely on the bus stops near the Seattle VA Medical Center, which are important to this community.
- There are typically more people with physical disabilities traveling near the Seattle VA Medical Center and using Route 36.
- Parking removal is a very contested issue in the community.

Beacon Hill Safe Streets

- BAT lanes with limited bus-only hours do not significantly benefit the community.
- Prioritizing bus-only travel during peak morning and evening times doesn't always echo the needs of bus riders who use transit for trips throughout the day and/or have alternative work schedules.
- Creating in-lane bus stops can help improve safety along sidewalks.

- The street median on Beacon Ave S between S Lander St and S McClellan St is an informal, mid-block crossing point for community members traveling across the road.
- Overcrowded buses can delay bus departure times due to:
 - passengers stepping on and off the bus so others can exit, and
 - the need for more time to maneuver around a crowded bus.
- Parking removal is not a concern for this group. Cars typically only hold one to two riders, while buses transport many more people.
- Recommends exploring ways to make the buses easier and more efficient to board/disembark.
- Recommends signal prioritization on Beacon Ave S from 14th to 15th Ave S.
- Recommends installing BAT lanes at Beacon Ave S and S Orcas St instead of signaling the intersection (currently all-way stop-controlled).
- Appreciates the continued coordination with the Beacon Ave S and 15th Ave S Safety Project.

El Centro de la Raza

- A mixture of visitors either regularly ride Route 36 daily or drive to get to their destinations.
- Route 36 has many convenient bus stops for the community.
- Some visitors drive instead of taking the bus due to safety concerns while waiting.
- BAT lanes are easy to navigate for drivers.
- Parking removal is a mixed concern within the community. Some community members are transit-reliant and less concerned with parking issues; others drive exclusively and expressed concern about parking removal.
- Recommends adding a stop light and BAT lane in front of Hilltop Red Apple Market as traffic congestion can make travel difficult and confusing.

FAQ

Below is a list of common questions asked by meeting participants and responses from the Metro team.

- Are in-lane bus stops better than buses pulling over into a bus zone?

- *In-lane bus stops are faster than traditional bus zones. In-lane bus stops eliminate the time spent pulling to the curb and merging back into traffic like in traditional bus zones. In-lane bus stops also reduce bus-vehicle conflict points since buses no longer must merge back into traffic.*
- Are these changes taking place in downtown Seattle or Beacon Hill?
 - *We are considering improvements in the Beacon Hill neighborhood where delays have been an issue.*
- How do BAT lanes affect on-street parking?
 - *Installing BAT lanes would require some form of street parking removal. We are quantifying how many parking spaces could change as we continue the design process, and we will communicate our findings as we know more.*
- What is the logic behind closing bus stops?
 - *We typically close bus stops related to two criteria: proximity to other bus zones that do not meet our service guidelines; or there is a bus zone only in one direction that does not have a match going in the opposite direction.*
- What is Metro's standard maximum number of blocks between bus stops?
 - *For most Metro services, the average stop spacing is every quarter mile or approximately every five blocks.*
- Is there a plan for Metro and SDOT to work together more directly, considering the Beacon Ave S and 15th Ave S Safety Project?
 - *Metro and SDOT are working closely on changes in the Beacon Hill neighborhood. As we progress, we will continue coordinating with SDOT to ensure both projects are compatible.*
- When can the greater Beacon Hill community expect more detail on this work?
 - *We will conduct much broader community outreach in the near future for our next phase of the project.*
- Is there a target for Metro's goal of increasing ridership?
 - *There is no specific target for this, but Metro is doing all it can to build ridership based on ridership data trends and an increasing population.*
- Where does Metro's on-time performance target come from?
 - *The on-time performance target is established in the Metro Service Guidelines. Our current targets are for buses to arrive between two minutes ahead of*

schedule and within five minutes behind schedule. Buses should arrive on time at least 84 percent of the time, considering external factors that could affect reliability.

- Do the improvement types outlined in this briefing (BAT lanes, turn restrictions/exemptions, in-lane bus stops, signal or intersection modifications, and queue jumps) make up all the changes under consideration?
 - *The five mentioned are the most common for this project, but other design options under consideration have minimum impact on the community.*
- What are you currently hearing from the public about Route 36 and this project?
 - *We are in the very early stages of this project. During this initial engagement phase, Metro shared initial design concepts with representatives from key community-based organizations within the study area via virtual briefings. What we heard confirmed that Route 36 is a high-ridership bus route with long-standing issues with travel times and reliability. We want to take steps through this work to improve the route proactively and will engage with the broader community as the development of improvements progresses.*
- Does each improvement package equally help the route meet its on-time targets?
 - *We are running tests and evaluating how these improvements affect reliability and on-time goals. We will have a better understanding of their effectiveness during level 2 screening. We look forward to sharing the results with the community for further input.*

NEXT STEPS

Metro and the design-engineering team will continue to analyze design concepts to identify potential improvements. **The team modified a proposed concept at Beacon Ave S and S Orcas St to maintain the existing all-way stop control and add BAT lanes in both directions instead of signalizing the intersection, as Beacon Hill Safe Streets recommended.**

Over the coming months, Metro will finalize the project improvements list, prepare concepts for 10% design, develop preliminary cost estimates, and publish a final report with recommendations for the next phase of design and community feedback.