

Eastside Rail Corridor

1) What is the Eastside Rail Corridor?

The Eastside Rail Corridor is a 42-mile rail corridor stretching from the city of Renton to the city of Snohomish, with an eight mile rail spur running between the cities of Woodinville and Redmond. The rail corridor passes through the cities of Newcastle, Renton, Bellevue, Kirkland, Woodinville, Maltby, Snohomish and Redmond. The corridor is currently owned by the BNSF Railway.

The corridor was built in a different time, when available land around Puget Sound was plentiful. It would be impossible to recreate it today; without the Port's involvement to secure the corridor, it could have been sold piecemeal to private owners and lost to public use forever. Because of that, the Port of Seattle believes it must be placed into public ownership, guaranteeing that it will be available to serve the transportation needs of the region's citizens for years to come.

2) What is the status of the Port's purchase of the Eastside Rail Corridor?

In May, the Port Commission granted CEO Tay Yoshitani authority to negotiate final aspects of the transaction, and at a joint press conference, Yoshitani and King County Executive Ron Sims signed the necessary documents. Purchase price for the corridor is \$107 million; King County is contributing \$2 million for an easement along 26 miles of the southern portion. The County plans to develop a public access trail along those 26 miles through a process known as rail-banking.

The documents have now been filed with the Surface Transportation Board (STB), the federal agency that oversees rail transactions. The STB is expected to approve the transaction sometime in last quarter of 2008. Until that approval is given, though, the Port does not own the corridor.

3) What is the federal rail banking program?

The federal rail banking program allows rail corridors to be used on an interim basis as public access trails, while preserving the possibility of restored rail use in the future. Should the STB approve this transaction, the southern portion of the Eastside rail corridor would represent one of the largest and most significant developments in the history of the federal rail banking program.

4) How will the corridor be used in the future?

The section from Woodinville to Snohomish will remain in use as a freight rail corridor. Prior to the close of the sale, BNSF Railway – with the Port's approval - will select a shortline operator to maintain freight service to the customers who use it. That agreement would allow the shortline operator to operate an excursion train as well.

Once the transaction has been approved by the STB, the Port will host an extensive public process to determine how the corridor should be used. King County will also conduct a process to determine what citizens would like to see in a public access trail.

A feasibility study of commuter rail, and an adjacent trail, will be done by Sound Transit and the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC), under a bill (HB3224) passed this year by the Washington State Legislature. It will include a survey of existing studies and, as necessary, a feasibility study to provide information on whether commuter rail service between eastern Snohomish county and eastern King county, can be a meaningful component of the region's future transportation system. A report on the results will be provided to the transportation committees of the House of Representatives and Senate by February 1, 2009.

For more information, please visit <http://www.portseattle.org/business/realestate/eastsiderail.shtml>.

