Rail summit will prepare region for new commuter opportunities

On Tuesday, June 7, Snohomish County will host a free, half-day leadership summit titled “On Track: The Future of Rail in Snohomish County.” The goal is to develop a strategy, as well as support, for the inclusion of innovative rail elements into the county’s evolving transportation network.

We have a great opportunity now to advance the discussion of rail so that when these opportunities arise, we'll be prepared to move. From 9 a.m. until noon at the Edward D. Hansen Conference Center in Everett, you'll hear key government and industry leaders discuss the exciting opportunities involved in integrating rail into our future.

"On Track" will focus on the future of Sound Transit's light rail system, the success of rail in other parts of the country such as Sonoma and Marin Counties, Calif., as well as opportunities for interstate passenger rail through Snohomish County. These presentations will be followed by a moderated panel discussion with a question/answer period designed to get to the heart of what's needed to keep us on track with rail service.

To cap off the afternoon, you’re also invited to a complimentary lunch program hosted by the Cascadia Center with additional discussion and information on Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit. During lunch, you’ll learn the history and past challenges facing rail in California, you’ll explore the political environment surrounding a 70-percent favorable vote for service, and you’ll discover what’s ahead for the project and what we can learn from their experiences.

Again, the summit is free and open to the public, however, an RSVP to Isaiah Billingsley at ibillingsley@discovery.org or 206.292.0401 is required for the lunch. For questions about the summit, please contact my Executive Director, Peter Camp, at 425.388.3460 or peter.camp@snoco.org. To view an agenda, click here.
Reardon keeps pledge to stimulate job growth, investment

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon has signed an ordinance in support of Project Catalyst – a targeted effort to speed permitting for development projects that put people to work in Snohomish County.

“In today’s business world, speed is critical to investors,” Reardon said. “Project Catalyst is one more effort that shows investors why Snohomish County is the most competitive place to grow their business and create jobs.”

Already, Project Catalyst has resulted in permits issued for a variety of development projects in time for the peak of construction season. Since December, Project Catalyst has reduced the queue for projects by nearly two-thirds and cut review times by more than 50 percent.

Local builders have expressed their support for Reardon’s commitment to streamlining processes.

“We’ve seen the recession and staffing cutbacks lead to costly slowdowns in other jurisdictions,” said Lynn Eshleman, president of the Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties. “Executive Reardon understands that government needs to be a partner to create jobs in our community. Project Catalyst has been a shot in the arm and shows that he is dedicated to business investment and job growth in Snohomish County.”

Project Catalyst, unveiled by Reardon during his annual State of the County Address, allows the county’s Planning and Development Services to utilize a combination of targeted overtime, additional staff resources and critical path analysis to speed up the permit process for complex projects, allowing those projects to move forward with construction more quickly.

“This effort is all about being competitive and attracting job growth,” Reardon said. “The quicker companies have permits in hand, the sooner they can put people back to work building projects or expanding their business.”
The Snohomish County Council formally gave its support for Reardon’s proposal last week by approving an ordinance detailing additional funding for the targeted staffing resources called for in Project Catalyst. The project is supported by fees charged to developers and has no impact on the county’s general fund.

The additional resources mean that speed can be achieved without decreasing the quality of the review, ensuring that projects are built to code and proper standards. To date, actual overtime expenditures for Project Catalyst have been less than budgeted, meaning the program has been even more efficient than initially anticipated.

“We have worked very hard during the past seven years to become the fastest and most competitive area in the region,” Reardon said. “Project Catalyst shows once again our commitment and creativity.”

County uses $1.1 million grant to counter foreclosures

Snohomish County will use more than $1.1 million to create more affordable housing options while reversing the effects of foreclosures in surrounding neighborhoods.

The Washington State Department of Commerce recently awarded Snohomish County $1,102,500 in Neighborhood Stabilization Program 3 funds through a competitive selection process. Snohomish County’s proposal to implement a new housing project in partnership with Housing Hope was the top-ranked project statewide.

“These funds come at a time when we are working hard to turn around the effects of foreclosure and bring affordable housing opportunities to our families in need,” Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon said. “Working together with Housing Hope allows us to leverage our dollars and resources for the greatest impact.”

Specifically, the new funding will allow Housing Hope, a local nonprofit affordable housing developer, to acquire 14 foreclosed, bank-owned townhomes in Marysville. The townhomes will be used to provide rental housing for low-income and homeless persons. Families will have access to services and education to help them increase income to a housing wage level.

The Park Place Townhomes will serve as an extension of Housing Hope’s Ten Degrees Program, which provides affordable housing and an educational support program for its low-income participants. The Ten Degrees Program is a special, onsite educational program that was created to assist participants in accomplishing their academic or
vocational goals through higher education.

An education coordinator assists family members in establishing career and family goals, helping them with college enrollment and participation and coordinating skills training.

Snohomish County has been successful in receiving past Neighborhood Stabilization Program funding, and this new award allows the county to build on its prior successes by continuing to help hard-hit neighborhoods.

In total, the state awarded $5 million to four projects out of 12 applications for funding.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read my electronic newsletter.

If you would like to send me your comments and feedback, or if you would like to unsubscribe, simply reply to this message.

You may also contact me directly by phone at 425.388.3460.