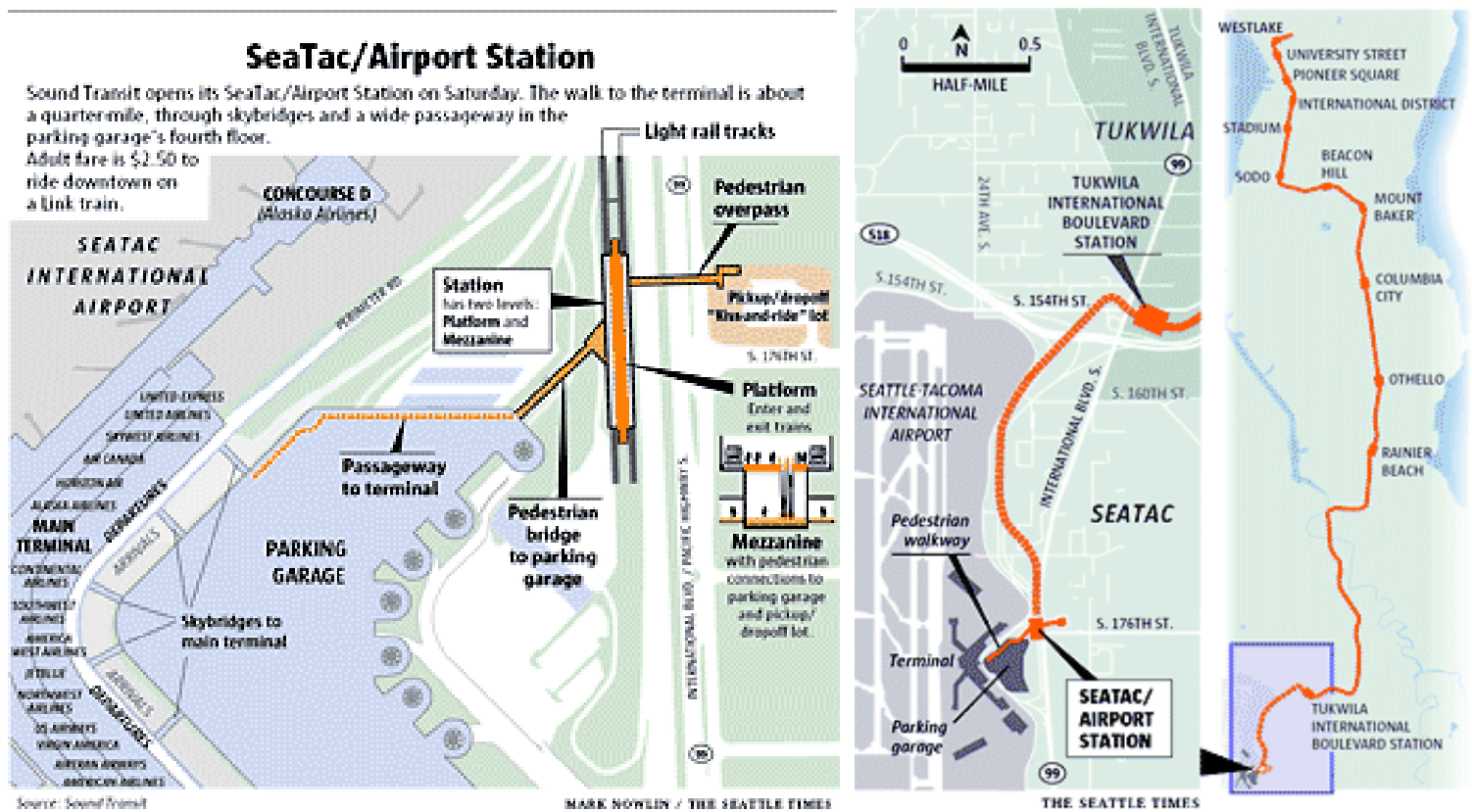


Airport Light Rail Station



The Link light-rail SeaTac/Airport provides a direct pedestrian connection to the airport terminal. The SeaTac/Airport station is about a quarter-mile from the main terminal via a skybridge and a path through the parking garage.



About Airport Link

PLATFORM

Trains arrive on the upper station level, 60 feet high, on either side of a central platform. Riders descend to a mezzanine to reach a skybridge and passageway leading to the airport terminal.

CONNECTIONS

Public-transit buses, taxis and shuttle vans at air terminal; Metro bus #174 next to station on Highway 99. In June, a new RapidRide (bus-rapid-transit) service will run every 10 minutes on Highway 99.

NEIGHBORHOOD ATTRACTIONS

Hotels on Highway 99. Views of airfield and mountains from top level of station. Bow Lake one-third mile south, Angle Lake Park one mile south. City of SeaTac wants to convert station area into a mixed-use "downtown" and entertainment district.

DID YOU KNOW?

Sound Transit might consider extending the track two miles farther south in a few years to reach South 200th Street, serving more businesses, a park-and-ride lot, airport employees and SeaTac residents. That segment (once promised to voters by 2006) would be done sooner than the entire south-end corridor to Federal Way, scheduled to open in 2023.

Airport link

Grand opening: Dec 19th 2009

Fare (downtown to airport): \$2.50.

Travel time: 36 minutes

Train frequency: varies between 7 ½ minutes and 15 minutes depending on time of day

By Mike Lindblom Seattle Times transportation reporter

Starting Saturday, light-rail riders will finally get to take a train all the way to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

The airport stop will not be Link's busiest station, but for thousands of non-commuters — locals as well as visitors — it provides a major incentive to use the new rail system at least occasionally. For \$2.50, an adult rider can take a train between the airport and downtown Seattle.

For now, the airport station — which opens at 10 a.m. Saturday — will serve only riders from the north. But the regional system will eventually stretch to Lynnwood, Overlake and north Federal Way by the early 2020s.

Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels and other boosters succeeded in opening the \$268 million airport segment and station just in time for the Winter Olympics in Vancouver, B.C., when some tourists will pass through Seattle. The airport stop adds an alternative to buses or taxis. Vancouver opened an airport rail station in September, and Portland in 2001.

Up in the air

With its open-air walkways, chill breezes, highway and tarmac vistas, visible pipes and jet fumes, the station seems to celebrate the maelstrom that is modern air travel. It also saved money, after Sound Transit scaled back the original design, including some windows.

Trains stop on an upper level, on a centered platform that is covered by a truss roof but exposed to south winds. (To get to Seattle, you get on whichever train comes first, on either side.)

Drop one level to the mezzanine. To one side are 32 chairs where friends might wait, and public restrooms. A video screen to show arriving and departing flights will be installed in January. Baggage carts are available for a \$4 rental fee, and might be helpful for the quarter-mile walk west across a fourth-floor skybridge and through the parking garage to the terminal.

The wide and well-lit walkway is divided from parked cars by steel-mesh fence and yellow posts. There are directional signs in blue leading to the terminal skybridges, where the Port of Seattle added several maps of the station and airport layout.

Not an option for all

Nancy and Rod Black of Yuma, Ariz., journeyed 49 miles on transit trains earlier this week, from Everett to the International District to Tukwila, where they switched to a white shuttle bus for the final leg of their trip — from Tukwila to the airport. Nancy Black says she prefers light rail, but says the lengthy walk from the airport station to the terminal might be a hardship.

"What if you can't walk? That is a question," said Black, who has arthritis and uses a cane.

People-movers were not built, because those would cost millions, nor do the Port and Sound Transit keep electric carts, rental wheelchairs or pedicabs at the station. Patrons can contact Huntleigh, an airport contractor, for free wheelchair service, preferably several hours in advance (206-433-5287).

Tom Beebe of North Seattle, a frequent flier taking the #194 express bus (which Metro will discontinue in February) to the airport on Monday, said the idea of a train from Westlake Center appeals to him, but that he would hate the airport station walkway in cold weather. "I like being able to step out of baggage claim and get on a bus," he said.

Linn Heng of Los Angeles visited a week too early to try the new station. "It will be nice to have the new link directly from the airport to downtown," she said aboard a train heading to Tukwila. Taking the white shuttle buses to the Tukwila station has added about 10 to 20 minutes to the trip to or from downtown, which starting Saturday is expected to take 36 minutes total.

Heng and her companion spent time walking throughout downtown, so a quarter-mile is no big deal, she said.

Beyond the airport

Though farther from the terminal than some would like, one advantage of the station site, along Highway 99, is that it should make construction simple as tracks are extended south, said transit spokesman Bruce Gray.

Also, local drivers can drop off loved ones, heading downtown or to ballgames in Sodo, at its "kiss-and-ride" lot next to the highway. The site is reachable on foot from hundreds of apartments and condos to the east.

In June, a new Metro bus-rapid-transit service called A Line will reach the Tukwila and SeaTac/Airport stations from the south every 10 minutes, for easy transfers to Link.

Air travelers converge on Sea-Tac from so many directions that a downtown line will carry only a fraction of them, at least until more suburban lines are connected.

So for now, shuttle services say they aren't too worried about the competition.

"We'll probably lose a number of college kids and maybe a few businesspeople who have a briefcase, but other than that it should not affect us," said Cliff Lund, a Shuttle Express coordinator at the airport. His clients tend to bring lots of luggage, "which is inconvenient for light rail." Link trains are almost always uncrowded enough to bring a suitcase aboard for those willing to pack light.

Sound Transit makes no near-term ridership prediction, but says 4,000 people a day will hop a train at the airport by 2030, when the network stretches in three directions.

"It's going to take people some time to realize this is an easy option for them," Gray said. "But ridership will grow eventually."