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## \$17M rehab for King Street Station

*This is not the grand renovation once envisioned but a second phase could cost as much as \$200 million.*

By [MARC STILES](#)  
 Journal Staff Reporter

After about a decade of talk, the 97-year-old King Street Station finally is going to be renovated.

The \$16.9 million first phase is not as extensive as the \$43 million renovation once proposed. But it's the start of a grand plan to change not only the red brick station but also the streets of the southern part of downtown Seattle.



Rendering by J. Craig Thorpe

Transportation planners say the second phase, shown here, could make the station an intermodal facility, with more tracks and new street bridges.

Interim work has begun. Rest rooms have been gutted and reconstruction is to start early next month. Westmiller Construction of Seattle is the contractor.

Bids for the rest of the first phase, designed by a team from Otak led by architect Peter Watson, will be advertised this spring, says Ron Sheck, manager of the State Department of Transportation's Urban Rail Program.

"We're trying to decide right now if it's going to be one or two bids or a package of bids," Sheck said. "We're working with our facilities people and the architect to see what gives us the best bang for our buck."

The first phase will alter the station from top to bottom, making it more user friendly for travelers, said Sheck, coauthor of "Guidebook on Train Station Revitalization," published by the Great American Station Foundation.

### Coming full circle

King Street Station was built when James J. Hill decided to extend his



Great Northern Railroad to Puget Sound. One hundred years ago, he hired the renowned architecture firm of Reed and Stem, designers of New York's Grand Central Station, to come up with a station to make the nascent city proud. The architects did not disappoint.

With a clock tower modeled after the campanile at the Piazza de San Marco in Venice, King Street Station was built with ornate plaster ceilings and wainscoting of marble, glass and gilded mosaic. Natural light streamed through the station when it officially opened in 1906.

The rise of auto and commercial air travel caused railroads to suffer and stations to deteriorate. Money was spent modernizing King Street in the early to mid-1960s, and now the state is gearing up to undo that work.

About 40 years ago, wood doors were replaced with steel ones, and the large windows were covered. Next year, new wooden doors will be installed and windows uncovered to let natural light once again flood the waiting room.

A portion of the waiting room that had been closed for storage will be reopened. The ticket office and baggage drop-off will be moved from the south side of the waiting room to the north side.

The entrance, with its tile compass, will be refurbished. The grand staircase that leads from the compass up to Jackson Street will be reopened, and the Jackson Street parking lot will become a pedestrian-friendly plaza. Also on tap are electrical and heating upgrades.

One improvement that must wait is removing the suspended ceiling hung in 1965 to hide the waiting room's ornate ceiling. "We're going to put in a different drop ceiling because to restore the original ceiling is money we don't have at this phase," said Sheck. The exact style has yet to be decided. "It will be tiles, but it will look better than this."

The most noticeable exterior changes will be restoration of the clock and the historic King Street Station neon sign facing Jackson Street.

Other exterior work includes replacing canopies, re-pointing the brick and installing a new roof. Broken windows will be replaced and window frames repaired. The 1954 brick addition that houses defunct escalators will be removed.

### **More tracks needed**

The work underscores the rail's renaissance in the Pacific Northwest. The funding partners -- the state and federal governments, Sound Transit and the South Downtown Foundation -- are fostering the revival.

WSDOT saw the potential when Amtrak started increasing the number of trains with its Cascade service in the 1990s. In 1996, voters in the Puget Sound region created Sound Transit, which launched inter-city commuter rail service and plans to significantly expand it.

So King Street, already the third busiest train station west of Chicago (behind Los Angeles and San Jose) is getting busier. King Street eventually could host 70 passenger trains a day, according to Sheck. "There's a capacity issue with that."

The original \$43 million renovation, based on a complicated financing package, called for a nonprofit organization to sell tax-free bonds and buy

the station from Burlington Northern Santa Fe. The nonprofit was to renovate the station and lease the property to the state DOT, with Amtrak continuing to use the station.

Seattle's Nitze-**Stagen** & Co. was to be the developer. "Sometimes things don't work out as everybody hopes," said Kevin Daniels, Nitze-**Stagen** president.

The plan started to unravel in 2001 when modeling indicated the need for more tracks. Why spend \$43 million on a complete renovation when a portion of the remodel would be ripped up to add tracks?

Adding tracks is still planned as part of a future phase, and it's no small feat. One option was literally raising the station. Sheck said it's possible to lift the station but not the tower.

Another possibility is to convert King Street to an intermodal facility for buses, the waterfront street car and the monorail, with light rail at Union Station next door.

The plan calls for extending existing stub tracks through the eastern part of King Street Station. The waiting room would move up to the second and third floors, with concourses extending to the train platforms.

"If we pushed the waiting room up to the second and third floors, the main entrance would shift up to Fourth and Jackson, and we would create a plaza and drop-off. We'd do a little lidding over Third Avenue and over the railroad tracks to give us a bigger drop-off."

In addition, bridges on South Jackson, Main and Washington streets and the Second Avenue South extension might have to be rebuilt, according to Sheck, who said preliminary estimates for the entire second phase range from \$150 million to \$200 million. "Two-thirds of that is bridge and track work."

Work on this has begun, with HDR, an architectural and engineering firm, as the consultant.

"They're not coming up with the answers, but they're going to define the problem more precisely," Sheck said. "It's a scoping study."

Motivated by a desire to further improve the neighborhood where it has invested significant capital, Nitze-**Stagen** still is interested in working on King Street Station.

"We'd like to compete again for it," Daniels said. "I think it's a great example of a public-private partnership. It seemed to work well at Union Station, and I think it would work well at King Street Station, too. We could get it done quickly, effectively and correctly."

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