

(TRANSPORTATION)

## Can Rainier Valley Hold Out for Sound Transit?

**THREE YEARS** after its initial groundbreaking, Sound Transit's long-awaited light rail project is starting to take shape. Unfortunately, so are some unintended economic consequences.

With another three years remaining until completion, many local business owners look forward to the economic benefits of an improved transportation system, but others worry about a looming economic squeeze in places like Seattle's Rainier Valley.

In the long term, the new transportation system is expected to make the area more desirable for businesses and homeowners, spurring new developments. Landlords are ready to take advantage of the boom by raising rents. But at the same time, many of the neighborhood businesses that will pay these higher rents say that they have suffered significant losses in revenues due to years of noise, construction debris and traffic detours.

The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported that at least one business owner, Heidi Dang of the Sunlite Hair Salon, complains that she has suffered a 70-percent drop in revenue during the past two years of construction on the light rail system along Martin Luther King Jr. Way.

Some of the area's businesses are worried that higher rental rates and more road disruptions could force them to move or to close.

While activists and community groups are working with the city to ensure that rents remain affordable after the trains start running, Sound Transit is trying to mitigate the negative impacts of construction. In addition to its help with advertis-

ing and signage, the agency offers lunchtime bus tours of the light rail construction. These tours have a dual purpose: to educate the public about the Link light rail project and to bring new customers and a spike in business to restaurants along the construction route.

Designed specifically for busy downtown workers, the Friday tours depart from Fifth and Jackson at 11:30 a.m., and travel through neighborhoods along the construction route. At the end of each tour, the bus stops for lunch at a nearby restaurant, providing time for participants to ask questions of the Sound Transit officials.

For information about Sound Transit's August Lunch Bus Tours, visit [soundtransit.org/projects](http://soundtransit.org/projects), or contact Nancy Lui (206.370.5516).

—Carla Saulter

LIGHT RAIL CONSTRUCTION IS CHUGGING ALONG, BUT AT WHAT COST TO LOCAL BUSINESSES IN THE RAINIER VALLEY?



(REAL ESTATE)

## DOME-OVER?

**HOME TO COUNTLESS** rock concerts, monster truck competitions, college graduations, and high school sporting events, the City of Destiny's landmark Tacoma Dome

has fallen on hard times.

Losing out to newer or more intimate venues such as White River Amphitheater, the Paramount in Seattle, and Everett Arts Center, the 23-year-old facility (with its iceberg-colored rooftop, stark concrete interior and dated I-5 marquee) has seen a drop in business. Last year, the building lost \$300,000, according to the city's public facilities staffers.

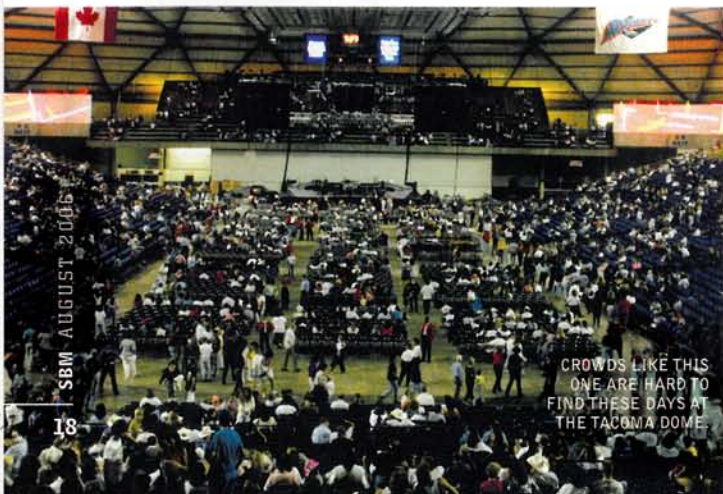
Tacoma residents also don't seem to feel much love for the building that has long been part of the city's image. City voters twice rejected \$45-million bond measures (one last September, another in February) designed to spruce up the Dome.

That multimillion-dollar wish list—which included

a larger concourse, new concessions and restrooms, seating upgrades, and revamped dressing rooms for performers—has turned into a \$2.7-million general-fund loan that Tacoma City Council approved in June. The funds are paying for a pared-down list that includes new turf and fixtures that will turn the Dome into a smaller concert setting. According to Dome representatives, concert promoters are looking for venues that seat 5,000 to 8,000 people; the Dome currently accommodates 23,000, leaving embarrassed performers to play to an ocean of empty seats.

"We plan to have the turf installed this fall, and the concert configuration installed and ready to go early next year," says Beth Sylves, marketing manager for the Dome. The goal, according to Sylves, is to capture 12 small-venue concerts per year and slowly chip away at those \$45 million upgrades.

—Todd Matthews



CROWDS LIKE THIS ONE ARE HARD TO FIND THESE DAYS AT THE TACOMA DOME.