Supporters of the Sound Transit 3 project say it is the best option to cut down on the traffic congestion many commuters face daily.

Opponents say the money should be spent on improving the bus transit system by implementing more routes, more buses, and more bus-only lanes.

Sound Transit 3 is the third development project of the regional light rail system and will appear as Proposition 1 on the Nov. 8 ballots.

The expansion will cost an estimated $54 billion and is expected to be completed by 2040.

The transit system carries an estimated 50,000 people per day and connects the University of Washington to Angle Lake Station in Seatac, with 14 stops along the ride.

ST3 will extend the light rail system north to Everett, east out to Kirkland and Issaquah, south to Tacoma with stations at near Joint Base Lewis McCord and Tacoma Community College, and also out west to Ballard and West Seattle.

ST3 will extend further south with stations to be constructed on the northern and southern edges of Federal Way.

Along with the railway system, the Sound Transit 3 project will include two new Bus Rapid Transit lines, infrastructure and signal upgrades, as well as creating additional parking with the new stations.

“The main problems Sound Transit 3 is trying to solve are population growth and congestion,” said Geoff Patrick, the spokesman for Sound Transit 3. “Sound Transit 3 is designed to try to enable people throughout the counties to travel faster and flow past some of the worst congestion in region.”

On Nov. 8, citizens will have the chance to vote on the ST3 expansion, which will make the transit system five times larger than the existing railway. The project will in part be paid for by to several increases in taxes.

Sales tax on items increase 0.5 percent, motor vehicle taxes on tabs will increase 0.8 percent, and there will be a $0.25 increase on property tax for each $1,000 of assessed valuation, according to the website.

As a whole, the taxes will cost each adult an estimated $169 per year, or $14 per month.

The division of funding is shown on the website as $11 billion from bonds, $8.6 billion from existing taxes, $4.7 billion from federal grants, $27.7 billion from the new taxes, and $1.8 billion from other funding organizations.

The new development will include 62 miles of new light rail track, 37 new stations, and is estimated to serve more than 600,000 riders daily, according to the Sound Transit website.

When completed, Sound Transit will total 116 miles and have more than 80 stations, according to the website.

The approval of ST3 is resting on the decision of voters, with campaigns advocating for and against the development.

“Sound Transit 3 spends an extreme amount of money for very little return,” said Maggie Fimia, a steering committee member for Smarter Transit, the No ST3 campaign. “The main problems are not addressed.”

Commuters face problems such as congestion, traffic, and lack of viable transit alternatives, Fimia said. These will not be solved by expanding the railway.

“It’s a gold-plated option that we won’t see for another 20 years,” she said. “The message from Smarter Transit is that we have much better options.”

Fimia grew up in New York and has an inherited loved for trains, she said. She has worked in fields focused on transportation for years.

The subway system and Amtrak are examples of heavy rail systems, she said. Light rail does not actually refer to a lighter transportation car, but instead due to the lighter capacity.

“When they say 16,000 passengers, it’s a myth,” Fimia said. “That’s crush capacity, where people are pushed up against the windows. The actual capacity is about 12,000 in best case scenario. That’s a false comparison because it’s an unrealistic capacity. It won’t be packed like that every trip.”

Our region is 12th in the nation for transit ridership per capita, Fimia said.

“The better option is to continue building on our bus system,” she said. “Buses are flexible. You have to run that train whether its full or empty. You don’t have to run empty buses.”

Buses are the better transportation system alternative because they provide more accurate planning abilities and it is easier to match the service to the demand, Fimia said.

“This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” she said. “We need to do this now. The reality is this is not anti-transit or pro-roads, it’s about spending taxpayer money wisely.”

The ST3 plan is essentially just moving people off of buses and onto trains, Fimia said.

“We could have much better bus services if we had the state and the cities improve the HOV and carpool lanes,” She said. “The beauty of buses is that it can be done incrementally.”

Many of the people on the Smarter Transit campaign are Democrats, Fimia said, but people from either political party have endorsed the “No ST3” campaign.

“Both parties agree this is not a good investment,” Fimia said. “We’re on the brink of a transportation revolution, why would we lock into a 19th century model? It’s a streetcar.”

On the other hand, those who support the ST3 development do not see any other options that compare to the light rail system.

“It will really connect our region with mass transit,” said Abigail Doerr, the campaign manager for Mass Transit Now. “This is the only way to deal with the population growth.”

Within 20 years, our region is projected to grow by more than 800,000 more people, Doerr said. Although population growth is something we’re not able to control, we can make sure we are prepared for the future.

“Access to reliable transportation is the single biggest barrier moving up the economic ladder,” Doerr said.

ST3 is also environmentally friendly, more so than buses or single vehicles, Doerr said. The transit system reduces the amount of vehicles on the road, which ultimately leads to less air pollution, she said.

“This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity,” she said. “If we don’t approve, I don’t want to be in a position years from now where we say ‘what if?’”

In 2008, ST2 was approved but due to the national recession, the project lost funding, she said.

“We really haven’t made up for that,” Doerr said. “We were only able to go as far south as we are now, but ST3 ensures [the light rail] will expand further.”

As part of ST2, Angle Lake Station, located at the intersection of South 200th Street and 28th Avenue South in Seatac, opened in late September.

The project’s total cost was $343 million and includes 1,120 parking spaces, according to the Sound Transit website. The above-grade rails now connect to the transit system between the University of Washington and the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

In 2023, there will be a station developed at Highline, Doerr said. This will be a major benefit to people who live in different regions, but need a reliable transportation system to school or their job, she said.

Sound Transit has spent the last three and a half years developing the plans, acquiring necessary permits, and also collecting public feedback from the communities, Doerr said.

Over 40,000 people shared their input with Sound Transit, she said. Although the cost for ST3 means implementing new taxes, people mainly expressed concerns about getting the project finished faster.

“I think everyone will benefit from Sound Transit,” said Doerr.