

Executive Summary:

Each year, Sound Transit prepares an update on the development of its express bus, commuter rail and light rail services. The 2012 Service Implementation Plan, or SIP, describes service changes planned for 2012, together with preliminary service proposals and financial projections for 2013 through 2017. The SIP also includes a detailed report on the status of each bus and rail route and performance objectives for the coming year, including ridership and productivity targets.

The number of passengers boarding Sound Transit buses and trains increased significantly during the first half of 2011. Total system boardings for the first two quarters were up 9 percent over the same period in 2010. All modes showed increases except for Sounder commuter rail, which was down just under 1 percent. Central Link light rail, which started its third year of service July 18, is gaining riders at a slower rate than expected but still posted increases of 14 percent for the first half of 2011. ST Express and Tacoma Link also showed significant growth. These trends contrast with major service reductions taking place at most other transit agencies.

Sound Transit has not been exempt from the effects of the economic recession, and tax revenues needed to implement the full ST2 program continue to fall below original projections. To help address this shortfall, the 2011 SIP focused on ways to reduce expenses and provide more cost-effective service, particularly on the ST Express bus network. During the first half of 2011, several planned bus service improvements were deferred and low-ridership service was reduced or eliminated. Two bus routes were shifted to a lower-cost service provider, resulting in significant operating savings, and additional savings were achieved from more efficient bus scheduling. Central Link light rail trains were reduced from two cars to one car during low ridership times to cut energy and vehicle maintenance costs. Service on all modes was reduced or eliminated on "partial holidays," such as the day after Thanksgiving when there are fewer commuter boardings. Sound Transit is continuing to look for ways to deliver service more efficiently and at lower cost.

One of the biggest challenges in developing the 2012 SIP is the uncertainty over the service that will be provided by our partner transit agencies. Over time, the region's transit network has become increasingly interconnected with thousands of daily riders using more than one system. Community Transit, King County Metro and Pierce Transit all face significant budget shortfalls due to the recession, and each agency is in various stages of developing long-term plans for financial sustainability. All of the plans include reductions in service levels. These reductions have two potential impacts on Sound Transit: First, connecting local service delivering passengers to Sound Transit trains and buses may be reduced or eliminated, and second, partner agency bus service on shared regional corridors (such as I-90 between Seattle and the Eastside) may be reduced, which could result in passenger overloads on the ST Express buses serving the corridor. Many of the details of partner agency service reductions are still under development so it impossible to fully quantify the impacts to Sound Transit at this time.

King County Metro recently decided to discontinue the downtown Seattle ride free area effective Sept. 29, 2012. This change will impact all transit routes serving downtown Seattle, including Central Link. While eliminating the ride free area will increase fare revenue and make fare collection less confusing, it will also increase delays as passengers line up to pay fares or tap their ORCA card at the front door. Sound Transit will work closely with King County Metro and other partner transit agencies to help mitigate these delays and increased operating costs resulting from late operation. Potential mitigation measures are described in the ST Express section of Chapter 2.

Extending Sounder commuter rail to Lakewood is clearly the most significant Sound Transit service change in 2012. This extension will provide dependable commuter rail service to the South Sound area. The 2012 SIP describes the initial train schedule planned for the extension and proposed changes to ST Express bus routes that will improve train connections and reduce direct duplication between rail and bus service.

ST Express Bus

On June 11, 2011, Sound Transit began service reductions on eight ST Express routes and eliminated service entirely on one route as part of the 2011 Service Implementation Plan. These reductions were carefully planned to impact as few passengers as possible while still achieving meaningful cost savings. *Please note that because the reductions were implemented so recently, their impact on ridership, productivity and other metrics are not fully reflected in the ST Express performance ratings shown in Chapter 2.*

Opening the new Mountlake Terrace Freeway Station in March 2011 helped to counter the impact of the service cuts. This station allows Sound Transit to provide service to the adjacent Mountlake Terrace Park-and-Ride, one of the few transit facilities along the I-5 corridor with available parking capacity. Both Sound Transit and Community Transit commuter buses serve the facility, with ST Route 511 providing all-day, 7-day-a-week service between Mountlake Terrace and downtown Seattle. Since its opening, ridership on the two ST Express routes serving the freeway station has increased significantly and a number of peak period buses are near capacity. Sound Transit staff is continuing to monitor ridership at Mountlake Terrace and look for ways to increase passenger capacity to address overloads.

Sound Transit has partnered with King County Metro to prepare for the start of tolls on the Evergreen Point Bridge (SR 520). Tolls begin in December 2011 and are expected to increase bus ridership in the corridor by up to 30 percent. ST Express Route 545 (Redmond-Downtown Seattle) is currently near capacity during peak periods but additional service is planned for this core route serving the corridor. Sound Transit received an \$8.5 million USDOT grant for 11 new buses to be used on SR 520 service, and older 40-foot buses have been replaced with new 60-foot models to further increase corridor passenger capacity. Once tolling begins, Sound Transit staff will work closely with King County Metro to monitor service and respond to passenger overloads.

Proposed Changes to ST Express Routes

The service reductions and efficiencies implemented during 2011 resulted in greater savings than anticipated, and staff proposes to reinvest these savings in added service on the heaviest-travelled ST Express routes where we are routinely experiencing customer overloads. In the Snohomish subarea, peak-period trips would be added to **Route 510 Everett-Seattle** and **Route 511 Ash Way-Seattle**. In the Pierce subarea, route changes are proposed to coordinate with the opening of the Sounder extension to Lakewood and to avoid duplication with revised Pierce Transit service. In addition, service levels would be increased on **Route 578 Puyallup-Seattle**, **Route 590 Tacoma-Seattle** and **Route 594 Lakewood-Tacoma-Seattle**. As an option, the Operations and Administration Committee of the Sound Transit Board could choose not to reinvest these unexpected savings and instead capture the savings going forward. Given our primary mission as an organization, staff recommends that the savings be used to fund extra trips where needed.

Here is a summary of ST Express service change proposals for 2012:

- **Route 510 Everett-Seattle:** Five new trips would be added during peak demand periods to address overcrowding (proposed effective February 2012).
- Route 511 Ash Way-Seattle:** Two new trips would be added during peak demand periods to address overcrowding (proposed effective February 2012).
- **Route 574 Lakewood-SeaTac Airport:** The south terminal of this route would move from Lakewood Transit Center to Lakewood Sounder Station. This change would provide more park-and-ride capacity for Route 574 commuters and would allow Route 574 to serve as a Sounder connector between Lakewood Station and Tacoma Dome Station during times when Sounder trains start and end in Tacoma (proposed effective October 2012).
 - **Route 578 Tacoma-Puyallup-Seattle:** The weekday peak period extension of this route from Puyallup Station to downtown Tacoma would be discontinued to avoid duplication with Pierce Transit Route 400 and Sounder "reverse commute" trains. All Route 578 trips would operate between Seattle and Puyallup Station only. A new early evening weekday trip would be added to address overcrowding, and Sunday Route 578 service would be implemented at 60-minute service intervals, similar to the current Saturday schedule. Sunday schedules would be coordinated with Route 577 to provide a combined 30-minute service between Federal Way Transit Center and downtown Seattle (proposed effective June 2012).
 - **Route 586 Tacoma-University of Washington:** The segment of this route between downtown Tacoma and Tacoma Dome Station would be discontinued, since there are other options (including Tacoma Link) for service between these points (proposed effective October 2012).
 - **Route 590 Tacoma-Seattle:** Route 593 would be converted to Route 590 trips operating between Tacoma Dome and Seattle during peak periods. Midday and edge-of-peak "shoulder" trips would be added in response to heavy demand (proposed effective October 2012).
 - **Route 592 DuPont-Lakewood-Seattle:** Peak period service would be reduced from every 10 minutes to every 15 minutes to reflect current ridership and expected passenger diversion to Sounder. All trips would start and end at DuPont Station, improving connections between Dupont and Sounder trains at Lakewood. On the Seattle end, buses would exit I-5 at Seneca Street and continue through downtown via Seneca, 4th Avenue, Olive Way and Howell Street. This eliminates direct service to the SODO District, but cuts travel time to the downtown core by over 10 minutes while reducing operating costs (proposed effective October 2012).
 - **Route 593 South Tacoma-Tacoma Dome-Seattle:** This peak-period route would be discontinued with the start-up of Sounder service to South Tacoma Station. Trips would be converted to Route 590 service operating between Tacoma Dome Station and Seattle only (proposed effective October 2012).
 - **Route 594 Lakewood-Tacoma-Seattle:** Three new trips would be added in the mid-afternoon and early evening to address overcrowding (proposed effective October 2012).

Further details on the proposed service changes and an ST Express route-by-route performance analysis is included in Chapter 2.

Central Link Light Rail

Ridership on Central Link light rail continues to increase, but at a slower rate than what was forecast in the 2011 SIP and the agency budget. Total boardings for the first half of 2011 increased by 14 percent compared with the 18 percent increase forecast for the year. The quality of service continues to improve with the percentage of scheduled trips operated at 99.97 percent, the highest of any Sound Transit service. On-time performance during the first half of 2011 was at 83.81 percent, below the 90 percent target but a significant improvement over the 76.69 percent recorded during the first half of 2010.

Since Central Link service began, staff has monitored ridership closely and automatic passenger counter data was expanded to include trip-level and station-level boardings. The Central Link section in Chapter 2 discusses distinct ridership patterns that have started to emerge, including seasonal changes in total boardings and individual stations where ridership has been lower or higher than projected.

No changes are proposed for Central Link service in 2012. Chapter 3 describes the planned extensions to the University of Washington and South 200th Street scheduled for late 2016.

Souder Commuter Rail

Extending Souder commuter rail to Lakewood is clearly the most significant Sound Transit service change in 2012. In September 2010, Sound Transit contractors began constructing the “D to M Street” project, which will extend track from Tacoma Dome Station to existing Sound Transit-owned rails at M Street. This single-track extension will allow Souder trains to reach South Tacoma and Lakewood beginning in late 2012.

However, not all trains will serve South Tacoma and Lakewood. The proposed 2012 schedule will provide five morning trains from Lakewood to Seattle in the morning and five return trains from Seattle to Lakewood in the afternoon. Four morning trains and four afternoon trains will continue to operate between Seattle and Tacoma only because the single-track section between Tacoma and Lakewood limits the ability of trains to pass each other. South Line schedules will also be adjusted for better transfers with connecting buses.

Chapter 2 of the SIP describes the initial train schedule planned for the Lakewood extension, and Chapter 3 includes details of future South Line service improvements funded through the ST2 program, including additional Lakewood trains. Proposed changes to bus service associated with the Lakewood extension are described in the ST Express section of the SIP.

No changes are proposed for Souder North Line service in 2012.

Tacoma Link

Outperforming the SIP and budget forecasts, Tacoma Link ridership increased by 13 percent during the first half of 2011 compared with the same period a year earlier. Local trends affect Tacoma Link ridership more than regional factors. Tacoma Link ridership benefited from the start-up of downtown on-street parking fees in December 2010, increased enrollment at UW Tacoma and additional conventions and other events in the Tacoma area.

Construction of the new Commerce Street Station at 11th Street began in fall 2010 and the station opened on Sept. 15, 2011. In preparation for the station opening, service intervals were lengthened from every 10 minutes to every 12 minutes during daytime hours Monday through Saturday, and from every 20 minutes

to every 24 minutes evenings and Sundays. The schedule changes, which went into effect June 11, were necessary because the new station resulted in changes to signal cycles and increased passenger dwell time. Since these changes have been in place only a short period, it's too early to gauge the effect of the new station and the longer headways on ridership.

Additional information on Tacoma Link service and ridership results is provided in Chapter 2.

Preliminary Service Plans for 2013 - 2017

Chapter 3 of the SIP describes preliminary 2013-2017 service plans. These “out year” plans were updated based on the most recent vehicle hour estimates and capital project schedules. Service levels, ridership and fare revenue estimates shown for 2013-2017 are used to develop the agency’s Long-Range Financial Plan; however, the actual implementation of service changes is still subject to Operations & Administration Committee approval of the annual SIP.

2013

- Potential restructure of Route 560 (West Seattle-Bellevue) in conjunction with startup of Metro Rapid Ride Line F between Renton and Burien. Route 566 (Auburn-Overlake) will be included in the scope of the analysis.
- One additional Sounder round trip added between Lakewood and Seattle.
- Work with King County Metro to restructure Kent-area Metro service for improved connections with Sounder.

2014

- Potential restructure of Route 540 in conjunction with opening of HOV direct access ramps at SR 520 at 108th Avenue NE.

2016

- Two additional round trips added on the Sounder South Line.
- Central Link extended to South 200th, Capitol Hill and the University of Washington.
- ST Express Route 586 (Tacoma-U District) discontinued with U Link opening.

Additional details are included in Chapter 3.

Title VI Assessment

In compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the 2011 Service Implementation Plan includes an impact assessment of the proposed 2012 service changes on minority transit users and communities, low-income populations, and persons with a limited ability to speak, understand, read and write English.

The proposed service changes are expected to have limited impact on Title VI populations. The impact of proposed ST Express changes is mitigated by the availability of alternative bus or rail service in the same corridors. Sounder commuter rail will be extended from Tacoma Dome Station to South Tacoma and Lakewood, and will replace ST Express Route 593 commuter bus service at South Tacoma. Route 574

would no longer serve the stop at Lakewood Transit Center and would serve Lakewood Sounder Station instead; Pierce Transit local service would connect the former transit center stop with Route 574. Deleting the Puyallup-Tacoma segment of Route 578 is mitigated by the start of new Pierce Transit Route 400 that will connect the same points with more frequent service. The proposed deletion of the downtown Tacoma-Tacoma Dome segment of Route 586 will have little impact due to the frequent parallel service available on Tacoma Link, ST Express and Pierce Transit buses. An increase in Route 590 service is proposed to address heavily-used midday buses between Tacoma and Seattle and prevent overloads. Proposed changes to Route 592 will decrease service levels slightly for Lakewood residents, but will speed travel time to and from downtown Seattle significantly. While four stops in Seattle's SODO district would be dropped on Route 592 as a result of this change, frequent connecting service is available to the area.

The complete Title VI assessment of the proposed service changes is in Appendix D.

Accessible Services

Sound Transit's cost for complimentary paratransit services required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) have continued to rise. The estimated annual growth for this service is 10%.

Both the federal and state governments continue to cut funding for non-emergency medical transportation under the Medicaid Program. These cuts have increased the number of customers who are applying for and receiving paratransit services. If the current trend continues the actual rise in paratransit costs may be as much as 2 – 5% greater than the projected 10%.

Sound Transit will continue to provide funding for the special needs transportation coordinating coalitions in King, Pierce and Snohomish Counties.

Quick Guide to the 2012 SIP:

Chapter 1 summarizes the proposed 2012 service changes to be considered by the Operations & Administration Committee of the Sound Transit Board.

Chapter 2 includes a description and performance summary of Sounder, Link and each ST Express route, with background information on each proposed 2012 SIP service change.

Chapter 3 describes preliminary plans for 2013-2017.

Chapter 4 includes estimates of ridership and fare revenue for all three transit modes through 2017, and a description of the modeling and assumptions used to develop the estimates.