

Sound Transit Citizen Oversight Panel

Meeting Summary

February 18, 2010

COP Members Present: Dick Chapin, Miriam Helgeland, Mike Murphy, Dave Russell, Vic Sood, JD Wessling, Paul Wiesner

COP Members Absent: Josh Benaloh, Aubrey Davis, Chris Elwell, Bob Goldstein, Karen Miller, Stuart Scheuerman, Bruce Seiber

Others Present: Kathy Albert, David Beal, Val Batey, Kate Lichtenstein, Ron Tober, Jennifer Wiklund, Kathy Elias, members of the public

System Access Program and Flexible Station Access Program

David Beal described the System Access Program (SAP) and the Flexible Sounder Station Access Program (FSSAP), both of which are part of ST2. The FSSAP had its origin in concerns about the eight Sounder station parking projects and fears that too much focus was being given to parking as the only station access solution. Language was thus included in all of the project descriptions authorizing a study to look at other kinds of investments and to evaluate alternatives that would consume less land and offer more cost-effective ways to accommodate future demand. Alternatives might include pedestrian improvements, additional bus or bicycle facilities, kiss-and-ride facilities or off-site parking options. The Everett, Edmonds and Tukwila stations were not included in the FSSAP.

The FSSAP study will be looking for more cost-effective options across all stations and will include analysis of demand and utilization at each location. Demand is generally calculated by license plate studies and surveys along with growth projections which are incorporated into ridership models. Latent demand can be estimated by looking at the number of people travelling through a corridor who might be available to switch to transit. Asked if ST would consider an aggressive bike program that went as far as purchasing bicycles for riders, Beal said ST has consulted extensively with bicycle groups and applied for bike-related grants but has not considered buying bicycles. The consultant RFP is under development and will be released soon.

The FSSAP primary goal is to increase ridership with non-motorized station access a priority. It is intended for capital projects, not for operations. Asked what the trade-off is between the cost of a parking stall and the cost to operate a shuttle service, Beal said that is one of the things ST hopes to learn. Data will be available from the parking pricing study to inform that analysis. Asked about opportunities to support private entrepreneurs providing services to access the system, Beal said topography and density will be key. The parking pricing study looked at commuter rail systems around the country and found that the densest station area in ST's system is less dense than the average of all the other systems. ST could test out the effectiveness of

small electric vans circulating to pick up riders. The study will not explicitly include King Street Station even though it has many needs for improved access. It would be difficult to fund because of its location in the North King subarea.

The SAP was intended to be for smaller projects for locations not receiving major parking investments. The program would provide \$5 million per year over 15 years for a variety of station connections within one-quarter of a mile of a station for pedestrian facilities or one-half mile of a station for bicycle facilities. Projects should be matched with other fund sources and should provide non-motorized access or serve to make bus access better and more reliable. The program will have a component that solicits proposals from local communities as well as a component of internally generated projects. Asked whether circulator or feeder systems would be considered eligible, Beal said the capital components likely would. The SAP would likely fund 7 to 10 projects a year.

ST has not yet decided whether to call for projects this year. It will be a big undertaking that will be new for the agency. ST has yet to finalize who will be eligible to propose projects. Criteria for project funding will include: closing a gap in the network; improved bus speed and reliability; project readiness; availability of matching funds. Asked whether ST has origin and destination data for each station, Beal replied that it does for Sounder and will have for Central Link. Asked whether there was a dollar figure that was a reasonable cost for generating a certain number of additional riders, Beal said there was not a particular figure yet but there would be a criterion for cost-effectiveness. He also said there was not yet an established benchmark for what would be considered “success” in the program.

Transit Safety & Security Video

Ron Tober introduced the video by saying that it points out what transit employees need to be aware of in an environment of heightened security consciousness, as is currently the case with the Vancouver Olympics. The video was developed by the National Transit Institute as a dramatization of a terrorist group making numerous attempts to scout out attack opportunities in a major transit center. COP members watched the video and then offered comments and observations that Tober responded to:

- The video highlights the importance of training for employees. In ST’s case the training is conducted primarily by the partner agencies which provide the services. ST requires extra awareness training of its Securitas private guards.
- The recent incident of the teenage girl assaulted in the downtown Seattle tunnel while guards stood by was alarming to many people. ST uses a different firm than Metro does and ST’s guards have different instructions. ST also pays several dollars per hour more. The ST security guards are not armed but are trained in “verbal judo” to diffuse dangerous situations.
- A gas attack on a subway system actually happened in Tokyo. There is also the common phenomenon of hoaxes and how to distinguish between a hoax and a real attack. Tober said there have not been any hoaxes or threats on the ST system but there have been incidents of packages left unattended that caused disruptions to operations.

- A typical incident like a bomb threat may involve a specific location, but in public health there are also covert biological hazards where there may be no immediate symptoms. In cases like that, it is essential that the public health department be at the table for planning.

Discussion

Members discussed the SAP and FSSAP presentation:

- COP should make sure the scope of the projects includes pilot projects for operating shuttle programs to bring riders to stations.
- It is confusing whether the study is intended to help develop policy or implement projects—it seems to be a blend of the two.
- That will depend on the analysis of land use and other factors at each station.
- There will be trade-offs between a community's political desire and what the planners suggest as the most cost-effective solution.
- The SAP with its small projects has greater potential for innovation and setting new policy.
- Some pilot operations are already in service, for example the Lakeland Hills circulator in Auburn. In Federal Way there is a need for something similar.
- The programs don't seem very imaginative. Especially the idea of inviting people to open houses will not elicit much in the way of ideas. It would be better to survey people and to create pilot projects and test them out.
- The focus should be more on developing new ideas.
- The study seems very broad in its scope. There is a danger that it won't yield much in the way of useful results.
- In defense of the current approach, feeder shuttles and circulators are not really in ST's mission which is to create the infrastructure for a regional system. The feeder services are a local responsibility.
- COP may want to offer comments on the scope of work and guidelines of the programs.
- COP could also schedule a smaller follow-up meeting with staff to explore some of these suggestions and ideas.

Comments on the security video:

- The employees in the film were impressive in how calmly they responded.
- ST may need to be more proactive on the training issue than simply leaving training up to its partner agencies. The training is also essential for all employees not just those who operate the buses and trains.
- There is also a question about how good the training is at the private security companies.

Member Reports

Paul Wiesner noted that several COP members attended the Bellevue joint Board and City Council meeting. He also reported that he attended the orientation for new ST Board members to talk about the role of COP.

JD Wessling reported that he had conversations with several Bellevue residents who were opposed to East Link and especially did not care for the elevated option.

Kathy Elias reported that the next meeting was scheduled to have outside speakers on the First Hill Streetcar and on transit-oriented communities. The March 18 meeting was tentatively scheduled for a tour of the East Link alignment and the East King County projects.

The meeting summary for the February 4, 2010 meeting was unanimously adopted.

Next Meeting

The next meeting was set for Thursday, March 4, 2010, 8:30 am.