

Sound Transit Citizen Oversight Panel

Meeting Summary

May 19, 2011

COP Members Present: Aubrey Davis, Chris Elwell, Phil Lovell, Karen Mask, Dave Russell, Stuart Scheuerman, Bruce Seiber, JD Wessling, Paul Wiesner, Harold Wirch

COP Members Absent: Annette Bailes, Josh Benaloh, Bob Goldstein, Vic Sood

Others Present: Kathy Albert, David Beal, Vida Covington, Paul Denison, David Huffaker, Ann McNeil, Mike Perry, Kimberly Reason, Melanie Smith, Rachel Smith, Bonnie Todd, Sharon Trnka, Kathy Elias, members of the press and public

South Corridor Planning

David Beal reported on Phase I of the South Corridor realignment study. The August 2010 revenue forecast indicated that Sound Transit's revenues over the 15-year ST2 plan were down 25% over the revenues assumed at time of plan adoption in 2008. South King subarea was already assumed to be borrowing more than other subareas, as its program was tight given the projected revenues. Additionally, South King was especially hard hit in the new revenue forecast with revenues down about 30% in the subarea. It was the only subarea where a significant project could no longer be completed by 2023. Subarea revenue was down \$850 million and the light rail segment from South 200th to Highline Community College was projected to cost \$600 M.

The Board in December 2010 directed that a study be conducted on the South King and Pierce project options in three phases. The first phase was a high-level overview, now completed, that built some 50 scenarios of various projects in various time frames. The major projects in the corridor include light rail segments to S 200th, to Highline Community College, and to S 272nd in Federal Way; contributions to fleet and maintenance facilities for Sounder and ST Express bus; and Sounder station and platform improvements. The key assumptions in the study were that subarea equity would be maintained, as would the current financial policies and the ST2 cost assumptions.

Whereas the early thinking in response to the downturn had been that Link would have to stop at S 200th, the Phase I study showed that Link could get to Highline CC with modest plan modifications but would also be able to afford only either fleet projects or a Sounder emphasis, but not both. Alternatively, ST could afford to do the fleet projects and the Sounder emphasis but not the light rail extension. All other scenarios would take longer. Light rail to Highline CC, fleet projects and Sounder emphasis would take until 2027. A light rail emphasis all the way to S 272nd with no other projects would take until 2034 and the full ST2 program would take until 2040. The overall debt burden in the subarea would still be about one-third. Asked how the

ridership and transit need in the subarea compare to the other subareas, Beal said he would provide that information.

The revenue picture is not as bleak as had been feared. The Pierce subarea has substantial remaining financial capacity and is able to complete its ST2 projects by 2023. The South King subarea has substantial capacity if Link stops at S 200th. Asked if the rental car taxes generated at the airport stay in King County, Beal said he would check and get back.

Legislative Report

Melanie Smith handed out copies of the state legislative agenda adopted by the Board. She reported that the Legislature was focused this session on passing a budget to deal with the steep revenue decline in state government. The Legislature was currently in special session. This session had no big issues related to Sound Transit (like the governance issues of past sessions). It did have a number of day-to-day issues such as utilities. No details are available yet on bills that passed. A number of state mobility grants were included in the budget, notably \$5 million for the S 200th segment of Link light rail. The top-scoring project was \$4.5 M for Sounder locomotives but this was not granted because funds were awarded only to “shovel-ready” projects.

HB 2053 which raises various fees for transportation is still in play. There is talk of a comprehensive transportation revenue package for next year but there is uncertainty what role transit would have in such a package. Emergency funding for King County Metro did pass the Legislature. Many new legislators have been champions for ST but the agency was simply not a focus of this year’s session.

Operations Update

Bonnie Todd began by providing an overview of the Operations Department. She explained that the Operations Department is divided into three groups: Transportation & Maintenance, Operations Support Services, and Facilities & Asset Control.

Paul Denison said ST recently conducted its 50th quarterly review meeting with Federal Transit Administration staff. He provided a handout for Central Link showing various performance metrics through March 2011. Ridership is up compared to 2010 but is only at 83% of plan with 21,300 average weekday boardings. Headway management is an indicator that shows the percentage of time trains operated within published intervals; during the first quarter of 2011 the figure was at 93% (90% a years ago). Unique challenges for ST are the joint operation in the downtown tunnel and the in-street running along Martin Luther King Way. Timers are located at Mt. Baker and at Rainier Beach stations. Complaints per 100,000 boardings are at 3.6, with the most common complaint being about the lack of sufficient space for luggage. One year ago the complaints were primarily about poor communication about service disruptions. Vehicle reliability was at 67,000 miles between failures.

Preventive maintenance inspections are an important factor in keeping the system reliable and are at 95% year-to-date. ST is very satisfied with the service it has received from the car

manufacturer Kinkisharyo. There is a rail car users group that ST participates in to share information with other systems that use the same cars.

The Central Link system is operated for ST by King County Metro under contract. Overall the partnership has been good although there have been some challenges. Many of the operators came over from having been bus operators and there has been a learning curve. Operators are held to a very high standard, especially with respect to safety. The joint tunnel operation has represented challenges. If a bus breaks down in the tunnel, the train stops. This happens several times per week and a tow truck must be called from the Atlantic Base. The joint operations agreement states that at some point in the future light rail will get exclusive use of the tunnel and the buses will return to the street. The earliest date would be 2016 when University Link begins service. Current throughput in the tunnel is about 60 buses per hour. Another challenge relates to the fact that ST collects fares in the tunnel but Metro does not.

Vida Covington reported that there was a big challenge at first with communicating to riders and to the public about Link service disruptions. The decision was made to create a new customer service position to address this function. Now there are announcements by messaging, email, website and public address system and the problems seem to have been resolved. Asked how customer service follows up on complaints, Covington said her group contacts the partner agency that operates the service and also follows up with the customer.

David Huffaker provided an overview of Sound Transit's Link cost trends. King County Metro operates and maintains Central Link. ST retains operation of certain areas, including security, ticket vending machines (TVM), fare enforcement, marketing, customer service and spare parts. The overall costs are split about 50-50 between ST and Metro. From 2010 actuals to 2011 budget, Metro's share of operating cost grew from \$20.4 M to \$22.5 M, or 10%. ST's share of costs grew from \$23.7 M to \$27.3 M, or 15%. The total cost per transit hour increased from \$332 to \$360.

Metro increased staffing from 170 to 182 positions; ST staff added one operations superintendent and 1 TVM technician. The fare vending system costs grew 61% because costs were reallocated from Sounder and STX to Link. Also, ORCA maintenance fees were reclassified from the regional fare integration program. Security costs grew 6% primarily because of a cost-of-living increase granted to the King County Sheriff's deputies. Materials and parts grew 34%. Utilities and traction power rose 15%. Power comes from Seattle City Light in Seattle and from Puget Sound Energy in Tukwila and at the Airport. Asked whether ST could purchase its power wholesale from Bonneville Power Administration, Huffaker said he did not believe ST had explored the option. The cost of power in this region is very low compared to elsewhere in the nation.

Insurance costs grew 68% due in part to set-asides for claims and in part to Link's share of ridership versus the other two modes. Agency administration rose 25%, costs attributable to marketing, legal, finance, facilities and executive. As Link has grown larger, its share of allocated overhead costs has grown larger.

Discussion and Member Reports

The meeting summary of May 5, 2011 was adopted unanimously.

The following comments were made on the presentations:

- The shortfall in South King County is based entirely on subarea revenues, not factoring in ridership or transit demand. If there is a need, couldn't dollars not being spent in East King be used in South King? [Kathy Elias was asked to check on the inter-subarea borrowing policy.]
- Ridership on both Sounder and ST Express bus is down in the corridor so the pressure to accelerate capacity is not there like it was several years ago.
- It is noteworthy that ST ridership was down, revenue was down, but operating costs were up. COP should continue to monitor this.
- The Light Rail program manager seemed to know how to get things done.

Harold Wirch reported that he attended the launch of the tunnel boring machines at the UW station. Phil Lovell provided a copy of the Community Transit operations report from the Edmonds City Council minutes. Bruce Seiber thanked staff for the response to his question about the responsibility for the heavy rail corridor in Pierce County. He said he understood that Thurston County was outside the RTA district and would have to annex and impose the full 0.9% sales tax if it were to be served by ST.

Karen Mask said someone had mentioned that the Kent parking garage was at capacity every day. She noted the same was true at the Mercer Island park and ride. Dave Russell noted that the Legislature passed the \$20 vehicle license fee for Metro but required a super-majority of the County Council to enact it. Paul Wiesner said he also attended the TBM launch.

Next Meeting

The next COP meeting was set for May 19, 2011, from 8:30 to 11:00 am.