

Sound Transit Citizen Oversight Panel

Meeting Summary February 5, 2015

COP Members Present: Annette Bailes, Josh Benaloh, Phil Lovell, Dave Russell, Stuart Scheuerman, Bruce Seiber, Vic Sood, Harold Wirsch

COP Members Absent: Fred Auch, Dave Berger, Bob Goldstein

Others present: Shelly Brown, Stephanie Lambert, Magda Ostrowski, other agency staff, members the public

Conversation with the Acting CEO

Acting CEO Mike Harbour began his remarks with an update on the health of Joni Earl, who continues to improve. She is engaged in the agency's operations through phone conversations with Mike and other staff. Joni is still undergoing extensive physical therapy, and assessing when and how she might return in a physical capacity to the agency.

ST3 – Staff are working on multiple tracks with the legislature in Olympia to increase the agency's taxing authority and seek approval by voters for a third round of regional transportation improvements. HB 1180 passed the House Transportation Committee on February 2, 2015. Community Transit hopes to seek authority for its own funding increase in a separate bill. Many issues remain regarding funding an overall transportation package, which is a priority of the governor, and increased funding for education, which is a mandate of the Washington State Supreme Court.

ST is also engaged in developing a fiscally constrained system plan from the long range plan adopted by the agency in the fall of 2014. That work involves difficult choices about how to complete the regional transportation spine, address subarea equity, promote transit oriented development (TOD), accommodate increased ridership, and facilitate system access. There is much more demand than money available to meet it. ST continues to work with its partner agencies and the 52 jurisdictions within its area of operation to find opportunities for cost savings and other efficiencies. The ongoing transit integration initiative with King County Metro is a model for other efforts.

Capital Projects

- U Link is a milestone project that is one year from opening and will change the way the system is used
- So. 200th Street will open six months after U Link and add significant park and ride capacity to the south

- The downtown tunnel is a big challenge because additional trains impact existing buses. The viaduct and seawall projects also affect service delivery. The agency is working with Metro, the City of Seattle, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and other partners on these issues
- Northgate – The project is well underway, with both tunnel boring machines operating and the first one expected to reach the Roosevelt Station area in about a month
- East Link – ST is working with the City of Bellevue on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Operations and Maintenance Satellite Facility (OMSF). Challenges remain in reaching an agreement acceptable to all parties. The MOU must be completed by the end of March when the project is baselined
- Lynnwood Link – The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) will be issued in 2015. Design is well underway. Difficult decisions regarding station locations are pending before the Board
- Federal Way Link – The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is expected in March and the locally preferred alternative (LPA) in May
- Tukwila Station Improvements – The project is complete and will be celebrated at a dedication ceremony on Wednesday, February 18
- Other Projects – The Mukilteo Station south platform construction project is expected to be complete in the first quarter of the year. The positive train control project should be complete by December 31, 2015. The two way transit project in the I-90 corridor will commence construction shortly
- Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) Loan – A \$1.33 billion loan from the U.S. Department of Transportation was executed in January 2015 at a record low interest rate of 2.38 percent. Because the actual interest rate is less than half what the agency anticipated, there will be between \$200 – \$300 million more available over the 40 year loan period than anticipated for projects, which could include some of those deferred from 572

On the personnel side, last year the agency began a management development program that has shown excellent results. Twenty six people participated in the first class, which included training in continuous process improvement, negotiation, and communications skills. The second class is underway.

Panel members thanked Mike Harbour for his time and candor and asked several follow up questions. Mudslides in the Sounder north corridor continue to cause disruption, in spite of construction projects undertaken by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) to reduce slides in the area. While the agency isn't considering a blanket closure of Sounder service during the winter slide season, it is considering specific advanced closures when forecasts warrant such action. Adding substitute service on weekends is more difficult than during the week, when partners are already running.

The decision by the U.S. Golf Association (USGA) not to transport attendees to the U.S. Open at Chambers Bay via Sounder trains is final. There were several determining factors, including the lack of

ability to quickly transport people back to their hotels in the event of bad weather midday. In addition, the USGA balked at paying full price for the service, for which it often receives a discount in other cities. The Department of Homeland Security may also have raised issues.

Savings generated by the lower than expected interest rates on the TIFIA loan may be used toward some deferred *ST2* projects. Staff will brief the Board on its options pending further planning for the Lynnwood and East Link extensions.

The agency is still anticipating a \$600 million Full Finding Grant Agreement (FFGA) for the Lynnwood Link project, which is already very competitively ranked by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). An FFGA will not be requested for the East Link project. Federal funding for the Federal Way extension may be explored.

Operations Department Follow Up

Mike Bergman, Service Planning Manager, provided additional information about the agency's management of overloads on ST Express at the Panel's request.

Ridership on ST Express has increased significantly each year since 2011, and today outpaces existing service hours. System wide, ST Express exceeds 40 passenger boardings per trip, more than Pierce or Community Transit, but less than Metro. The Operations Department strives to identify and respond as ably as possible to overcrowding within existing capacity constraints. Short term triggers like special events, construction, or traffic that have immediate but temporary impacts are identified through customer contacts and routine service monitoring. Long term impacts are triggered by budget changes, partner agency restructuring, or demand shifts and ridership growth. Tools to address immediate issues include an overload budget of 2,000 annual hours, minor trip shifts, and deployment of larger buses. Long term remedies include route and corridor restructuring as part of the service change process, additional funding, and a new, higher capacity fleet. Actions to address short and long term impacts are limited by a fixed budget, the size and composition of the existing fleet, operating partner agreements and the established service change process. Recent actions taken to address overloads include restructure of I-5 north service to add nine peak hour trips and an addition trip on Route 510.

The outlook for the future shows that ridership will continue to grow. New, double deck articulated buses that carry 20 more passengers each than the existing fleet (77 vs. 57) are in procurement. Money saved through the reduced interest rate of the TIFIA loan may be used to add back service hours that were deferred in the realignment of *ST2*. However, rapid population growth in the region, markedly increased congestion, and limited transportation funding options mean that overcrowding throughout the system will likely continue to increase.

Discussion

Panel members were happy to hear about Joni Earl's improved health. They were impressed at the progress being made to address bus overloads, but expressed concern about the future. Additional service hours are needed. Lead times of 18 months for bus procurements make it difficult to provide a quick fix. Planning for *ST3* seems to emphasize rail and will likely include bus rapid transit (BRT) for the eastside, but should also include significant funding for ST Express. There was discussion of the agency's role in providing bus service: Should ST focus on long haul buses, or on increased light rail that takes buses off the road?

Member Reports

Bruce Seiber noted that he was attending his last meeting as a panel member, and that his experience had been a great one. The COP thanked Bruce for his service, as did the agency, which presented him with a plaque.

Harold Wirch reported that his wife was doing well following hip replacement surgery, which had kept him from attending the Panel's January retreat. He had observed riders at the Mountlake Terrace park and ride the previous week, and noted that the local buses were, as usual, nearly empty. He reiterated his concern about the failure of local transit service to suburban communities. COP members acknowledged Harold's point, but noted the difficulty of influencing local decision making. Josh Benaloh suggested that efforts be made to include transit providers at upcoming COP community outreach meetings.

Dave Russell was the featured speaker at a senior breakfast, where his remarks were well received. He noted that the audience was composed of voters, if not necessarily transit users.

Annette Bailes noted the vastly increased number of riders on buses and trains. The reductions in gas prices haven't resulted in fewer transit users.

COP Chair Benaloh reported that he would miss the March 5 meeting, at which several new Panel members are likely to be introduced.

On-Going Concerns

- Robustness of the data network, including security
- Adequacy of local transit service to ST park and ride lots
- Adequacy of station design for East Link extension
- Recommendation for benchmarks on Sounder North
- Increased operating costs across modes in comparison to peers
- Orca card integration

The summaries of the December 18, 2014 COP meeting and the January 15, 2015 COP retreat were approved.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the COP was set for Thursday, February 19, 2015, 8:30 – 11:00 AM, in the Sante Fe Room at Union Station.