

Sound Transit Citizen Oversight Panel Virtual Meeting Summary

November 3, 2021

COP Members Present: Fred Auch, Scott Lampe, James Peyton, Helen Powell, Larry Sauvé, Joe Scorcio, Paul Thompson

COP Members Absent: None

Others Present: Kathy Albert, Adam Montee

Portfolio Services Office

- Moises Gutierrez – Executive Director – Portfolio Services Office
- Claire Turpel Chase – Portfolio Services Office Chief of Staff
- Aniekano Usoro – Deputy Executive Director of Project Controls
- Kerry Pihlstrom – Chief Engineer

Sound Transit staff discussed the Agency's Portfolio Services Office (PSO), which was established in 2020 to provide a centralized, independent office to increase transparency and accountability for the system expansion and service delivery lines of business. Among its objectives, the PSO seeks to improve transparency through centralized program performance reporting, increasing standardization through consistent, scalable requirements, and ensuring efficiency through the provision of adequate resources and processes.

The PSO is an independent department that reports to the Chief System Officer. Its functions include lessons learned and data management, portfolio management and integrity, project controls, and engineering. The staff structure has also been adjusted to implement realignment. In the fourth quarter of 2021, the PSO will update the Board on the status of realignment and provide a summary of steps taken to incorporate the independent cost estimate assessment team's recommendations from earlier in 2021. In 2022, the PSO will coordinate with other departments to provide regular reports and briefings to the Board in response to the realignment resolution, including an annual program review, an online program performance dashboard, a biannual report on cost drivers, a report on the cost savings work plan implementation, schedule assessments on project specific timelines to ensure necessary funding, and timely updates when project costs or schedules are materially impacted.

2022 Service Plan Update

- Michael Couvrette – Service Planning Manager
- Brian de Place – Director of System Planning
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Michael Couvrette and Brian de Place gave an overview of the 2022 draft service plan and key public feedback themes. Responses to emerging, pandemic related service delivery issues were also discussed. The 2022 plan envisions restoring service that reflects new all-day travel patterns, prioritizes equity, considers rider and community input, adjusts service based on ridership and operating conditions, and contemplates changes that will occur with future system expansion.

Proposed rail service levels in 2022 will deliver the benefits of high-capacity transit by maintaining Northgate Link service at eight minutes peak, 10 minutes midday, evenings, and weekends, and 15 minutes early mornings and late evenings. Sounder South will be restored to its full service of 13

roundtrips, while Sound North will remain at two roundtrips. When the Tacoma Link Hilltop extension opens, frequency of service will increase to 10 minutes weekdays and Saturdays, and 20 minutes Sundays.

ST Express service will focus on achieving parity across the region by increasing Tacoma and Federal Way service to 15 minutes weekdays and weekends to match service levels on routes serving East King, North King, and Snohomish counties. In response to continued growth in the South corridor and recent ridership trends, route 577 from Federal Way to Seattle and route 590 from Tacoma to Seattle will operate every 15 minutes weekdays and weekends. Route 560 from West Seattle to Sea-Tac and Bellevue and route 578 from Puyallup to Seattle will increase on weekends to every 30 minutes. Route 574 from Lakewood to Sea-Tac will add extra trips early morning and late evening.

The plan was shaped through multiple phases of input, including new stakeholder listening sessions that began in early spring. A well-attended online open house took place in August, along with a survey available in multiple languages that generated almost 1,250 responses and resulted in strong support for all day and equitable service increases.

Ridership monitoring continues to support more consistent demand throughout the day and more ridership outside the traditional rush hour. Riders are also continuing to return to the system. About 50 percent of pre-pandemic ridership is expected in 2022. Larger pandemic related trends show that when social distancing capacities were lifted in July 2021, demand was met on all modes. The delta variant delayed major employer and employment center return to office plans, which, coupled with major employer remote work decisions, may further impact commute patterns.

The industry-wide shortage of available operators continues to impact service delivery and has led to increased missed trips. An emergency reduction of ten percent in ST Express service operated by Pierce Transit will take place beginning November 7, 2021. Sixty-one trips per weekday will be eliminated on routes serving South King and Pierce counties. Longer wait times and more crowded buses are expected on routes that have sustained higher ridership during the pandemic. Additional reductions are possible and would delay ongoing service improvements. The duration of staffing shortages is unknown.

The Agency has adopted a flexible approach to restoration of service throughout 2022. Service levels will be restored to match operator availability. As staffing allows, improvements will be prioritized in South King and Pierce counties to improve service equity. All-day frequency will also be prioritized. Costs will be contained by delaying restoration of certain peak-oriented ST Express routes. Ridership will continue to be monitored as broader pandemic trends emerge.

Discussion

Portfolio Services Office – COP members were interested in the PSO and its role within the Agency. Although the PSO's responsibilities are greater in number and more in depth than those of the COP, there are areas of similarity. The PSO shapes the systems and processes for the Agency's work and assures that the Board's decisions regarding realignment are implemented. The COP reviews the Agency's decisions and actions to verify that they comply with voter approved plans. Regular updates on the PSO's work were requested and will be factored into the COP's 2022 workplan.

2022 Service Plan Update – COP members noted the extensive analysis used to create the plan. Many questions remain about future ridership and other issues as the region recovers from the pandemic. It was requested that ridership be tracked by new and returning riders. Staff will provide additional information about this and other questions as data is developed.

The summary of the October 20, 2021, virtual COP meeting was approved as amended.

Member Reports

None

2021 Focus Areas

- Adequacy and appropriateness of station access, including use of emerging technologies
- Monitoring and review of social equity, racial equity, fare enforcement, and inclusion policies
- Uses of peer comparison data
- Asset management plan progress
- Reliability and availability of federal, state, local, and third-party funding sources
- Customer experience focused metrics across the RTA region and transit agencies within it
- COVID-19, contingency planning, and disaster preparedness
- Program realignment, interagency cooperation, and interoperability
- Coordination with local jurisdictions to mitigate impacts of unauthorized parking around stations

Questions and Answers

- 1) Are Agency park and rides still charging for parking? If so, what are the rates across the Agency's portfolio?

Answer - Sound Transit's permit parking program is currently suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on parking demand. The Agency will continue to monitor the situation at its parking facilities and restart the permit parking program once demand returns.

- 2) What is the Agency's timeline for completing the before and after study for the Northgate Link extension?

Answer - A before and after study is currently only required of projects that have received funding through the Federal Transit Administration's Capital Investment Grant (CIG) program. Because the Northgate Link project did not include CIG funding, Sound Transit will not be completing a before and after study for the extension.

Next Virtual Meeting: Wednesday, November 17, 2021