

Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

August 9, 2023

COP Members Present: James Peyton, Paul Thompson, Lucas Simons, Tom Norcott, Tina Pierce, Helen Powell, Donia Zaheri, Scott Lampe, Joe Scorcio, Carston Curd, Charlotte Murry, Lorenzo Frazier, Gabriel Clark

COP Members Absent: Diana Cambronero Venegas

Others Present: Adam Montee, Kathy Albert, Chris Hoffman

Operations System Expansion Support

- Suraj Shetty – Executive Director of Operations
- Randy Kroum – Deputy Director of Operations Readiness and Transition

Sound Transit staff began by describing Operations role in system expansion, which includes ensuring that new projects align with the current system and that all assets can be tracked over time. Operations gets involved early in system expansion where they set up requirements and ensure that projects are well-served. They are also involved throughout planning, design, construction, and operations. Operations has two key teams: the Transit Expansion Division and the Operations Readiness and Transitions (ORAT) Division. Transit expansion has evolved from lessons learned, and for example they learned that operations needs to be involved early in the planning phase, and to ensure that operations are sustainable over the system's lifespan. ORAT is a global best practice that Sound Transit has adopted. ORAT has checks and balances, mitigates risks, and includes staff with a variety of expertise, including operations, training, and construction. Staff said that Operations staff in 2022 have reviewed over 8,000 submittals, conducted 142 punch lists walks, performed 92 commissioning and systems tests, and conducted 87 trainings. They expect to have 55,000 assets that will be transitioned to Operations by 2028.

At the activation phase Operations goes through a number of protocols to make sure the assets are ready for service. Rail activation includes numerous subcommittees and staff with varied expertise. At the pre-revenue phase assets are transitioned to Operations. At the beginning of pre-revenue service operations safety is front and center. There are a number of project and operations activities that have to occur at this phase to ensure all facets of the expansion will operate as planned. Pre-revenue service includes training and certifying operators, testing equipment, and simulating service. The pre-revenue service schedule is 120 days for the East Link Starter Line. Pre-revenue service schedules vary by project depending on when the project is delivered and project complexity. During the Pre-Revenue Service, Simulated Service Validation Phase staff run through several activities to get ready for revenue service.

At the revenue service date they are introducing the public to the system they monitor system performance including lighting, IT, public facing systems, and fare collections. There are a total of 55 systems that have to be monitored. Operations also monitors how the public interfaces with the system; they also track and monitor maintenance, as well as monitor and adapt security measures.

A COP member asked how many staff they have. Staff said the ORAT Division has 10 staff and Transit Expansion has a staff of 9. The entire Operations Department has about 275 staff and about one third of staff is focused on system expansion. Another member asked how Operations is handling the workload with ongoing expansion. Staff responded that they have to monitor that and determine where the escalation points are in order to identify priorities. A member asked about training and who does that. Staff responded that System Expansion does a lot of the training and that King County Rail focuses on

operator training. Another member asked if Operations trains people who maintain tunnels and bridges. Staff said that this training is done in combination with the contractor who does the initial training. A member asked how Sound Transit knows what its life cycle costs are. Staff said that they collect data on all the assets and asset planning looks at capital costs over time. They are identifying and beginning the procurement process on a new Enterprise Asset Management System (EAMS) system to replace the legacy system that we have today. A member asked if Operations inspects bridges through their access points. Staff indicated that Operations does initial bridge inspections as well as follow-up inspections throughout operations. A member asked about the Hilltop Expansion and issues with traction on the track alignment and staff responded that they believe they have resolved this issue but that it will continue to be monitored. Staff added that an emerging issue revolves at grade headway frequencies due to vehicles in the roadway. A member asked about their tracking system and how that interfaces with other tracking systems. Staff said they are currently procuring an Operational Readiness system that incorporates more automation with their tracking systems. They are going to the Board for approval to purchase the system. The COP said they would be interested to hear how the system works once it is up and running.

Bus Rapid Transit Program

- Bernard van de Kamp – Bus Rapid Transit Program Executive

Staff began by talking about the status of the program and its scope, budget, and schedule. Staff mentioned that this is a new mode for Sound Transit. The program, STRIDE, is comprised of three separate lines, S1, S2, and S3 and it also includes a new bus base. They are going to operate like light rail: 10-minute frequencies, 19 hours a day and with upgraded stations. There will be 26 stations over 45 miles. They expect travel times to improve significantly over the existing conditions. The Board approved this program two years ago and they expect more riders and better service than what was identified in the ST3 package.

Staff said they are near 90% design on most projects and are getting deep into permitting and right of way (ROW) acquisition. They are in partnership with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the cities along the alignment and they are moving ahead quickly with construction where they can with joint projects with WSDOT. Recent progress includes environmental cleanup at the Renton Transit Center, NE 44th Interchange construction, and completing the business access and transit lanes in Bothell. They have entered into early construction funding agreements to control cost pressures and reduce risks. Staff noted that Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) improvements on state highways earn land bank credits and offset future project costs.

The Bus Base North will manage the system and clean and maintain the fleet in Bothell and will have the capacity to house 120 buses, including ST Express buses. It will include an operations building, as well as parking and maintenance facilities. S1 and S2 will provide 37 miles of service from Burien to Bellevue. This will include inline stations, both new and existing. SR 522/NE 145th Street (S3) will be 9 miles long and will have 14 stations. This will include Business Access and Transit (BAT) lanes and higher quality access.

The baseline budget is the result of a six-month effort that includes a risk assessment. There is a significant amount of market risk, but staff said there is a 80% probability that they will deliver the projects at the specified budget. The battery electric bus fleet expense adds costs as does an expanded bus base. Labor, materials, and supplies costs have been escalating well above what was forecasted. All projects are coming in over the finance plan, with the bus base having the largest increase. The schedule presented indicated that they are running behind the schedule established in the ST3 Plan. That schedule assumed some of the projects would open before construction was completed. The Stride team moved away from that to smooth out construction and minimize impacts to the passenger experience. The

pandemic also had significant impacts on the schedule. The baseline schedule calls for delivery of S1 and S3 in 2028 and S2 in 2029.

Sound Transit is moving forward with fleet procurement to ensure they are ready when the projects are completed. The projects require new systems, and they are in process of procuring the operating systems. The Bus Operating Technology System (BOTS) includes passenger information, communications, surveillance and other systems. They will go to the Board later this month to get approval to purchase the new battery electric vehicles. They will use a combination of inductive (at layovers) and plug in charges at the base. Sound Transit will competitively contract out for the service provider.

A member asked whether Sound Transit will consider providing Stride Service to the airport if a light rail transfer at Chinatown/International District is not built as had been committed to the public and approved by the voters in the Sound Transit 3 System Plan. Staff answered no, they will have a station on Tukwila Boulevard with transfers to light rail. There will be no direct service from the Eastside to the airport. System expansion is being planned in parallel with light rail and it will have interaction with light rail. Staff claimed that STRIDE will offer faster and more direct access to the airport from Bellevue than light rail, even though in a previous meeting staff had claimed that light rail would be faster when a transfer at the CID station was planned. Staff said they are working on 100% design and have good interactions with jurisdictions. Staff acknowledged opposition in Lake Forest Park to widening on SR 522. Sound Transit is looking at the suggestions from the community.

A member asked about ridership. Staff said they expect about 20% improvement on the S2 line, from 10,000 to 12,000 riders. Another member asked how they will handle bicycles, inside or outside of the buses. Staff said they will have triple racks on the front of buses. A member asked if a vendor has been selected for electric buses. Staff said they have selected Alexander Dennis for the double-decker buses; they have built 4,000 electric buses in Europe. BYD (rebranding as Ride) will build the articulated buses. The member asked a follow-up question about the number of coaches that will be purchased. Staff said 32 double-decker buses and 14-16 articulated buses will be purchased. Another member asked if staff anticipates any issues with the timeframe for manufacturing buses. Staff said that they are allowing a lot of time for manufacturing (4 years rather than 18-24 months) to ensure that they are delivered when they are needed. A member asked about a pedestrian link in SeaTac. Staff said that a pedestrian bridge in SeaTac is still in the project, and it potentially could be improved by a private developer. A member asked if Sound Transit works with big companies to incentivize people to ride BRT. Staff replied that they haven't entered into any agreements with large companies but several of those large companies have written letters supporting the projects. A member asked if Sound Transit is looking into autonomous electric buses for future projects. Staff said they have no plans at this point for that, but this is the agency's first step towards going all electric. A member asked about the bus base and operators and whether they intend to hire operators as Sound Transit employees. Staff said that there are no plans to do that initially, but they want to keep all options open. Another member asked why Sound Transit is not continuing with other transit partners to operate the buses. Staff said they are open to that possibility, but they want to have closer control and ensure high speed and reliability and opening bus operation for competition will allow them to do that. A member asked about the details of charging the buses. Staff said that charging will take place overnight at the base and they will have a charge management system to charge the buses that need it most. They will also top off bus batteries using inductive chargers at transit centers where they lay over. A member asked about the range of the buses and staff said they have a range of 200-250 miles depending on the weather and conditions.

East Link Starter Line

- Moises Gutierrez – Chief System Quality Officer
- Matt Shelden – Deputy Executive Director for Planning and Integration

Staff began by introducing the topics, which include the East Link Starter Line (ELSL) and other 2024 openings. Staff provided a system overview and the proposed sequencing of opening different lines. At the time of the meeting the Board had not yet voted to implement the ELSL, but if the vote is in the affirmative, ELSL would be scheduled to open in March 2024 and Lynnwood Link Extension (LLE) in late 2024. Both Redmond and the rest of East Link will open in 2025 and the Federal Way Extension in 2026. This schedule is consistent with what staff have been presenting to the Board. There are benefits to the ELSL, such as providing additional service when it is ready, a steady rhythm of openings, maximizing warranty periods, and safety benefits. It also has risks, such as federal and state oversight, vehicle and asset readiness, and adequate staff resources.

ELSL readiness is based on the near completion of construction and testing, needed vehicles and space to store them, and the hiring progress (especially with critical positions). The service level will include 16 hours per day with 10-minute headways and two car trains. Sound Transit anticipates 6,000 weekday boardings. For Lynnwood they are progressing as scheduled and they predict to have the vehicles needed ready to go, despite some storage challenges. For needed staff they have a medium confidence level for filling the positions they require. They do have more time to fill these positions before the September 2024 opening. They expect 20 hours of service per day with 8-9 peak headways and 10 and 15 minute off peak headways with 3 or 4 car trains. They expect 100,000 – 136,00 daily boardings.

Beyond construction, Sound Transit has other activities that have to be completed to ensure safety, reliability and to account for passenger needs. They will seek Board approval later this month on the starter line. They will seek Board approval on Lynnwood in October.

A member asked if there is an opportunity cost to opening ELSL in 2024, such as a delay in opening Lynnwood Link. Staff said no, they do not believe the decision about ELSL will affect timing of any of the other ongoing projects. A member asked if there is a scorecard that is available for these projects and if there is a quality component. Staff said that there is a project performance tracker on the website and they will soon be adding a quality component to the tracker. A member asked how many people are in the System Quality organization. Staff replied that they have about 200 full-time employees and that they rely on consultants as well. A member asked about ELSL warranty and how long it is. Staff will have to get back with specific information on the many warranty periods. Another member asked what difference it makes to the warranty by opening sooner. Staff said that once the project is complete, the clock starts ticking on warranties. Because the assets would be idle the agency would have less opportunity to discover problems that are under warranty. A member asked how Sound Transit will store train vehicles before the full East Link is open. Staff said that they will temporarily store vehicles on the line (a maximum of 20), specifically on pocket tracks at Northgate and Angle Lake. Another member asked if changing parking habits have been taken into consideration. Staff said they will have more parking capacity at Lynnwood (1900 stalls) and increased connections from local transit providers. A member asked if the 550 bus will stop at Bellevue once starter line opens. Staff responded that the 550 will stay in service across the lake until the full East Link Extension is open. Another member asked if LLE or ELSL will have to cease operations when the full East Link line opens up. Staff indicated that both operate distinctly so they don't expect impacts to Lynnwood when the full East Link Line begins service. A member asked about the lead time on hiring operators. Staff said that it takes a lot of time to identify and train operators and that there is also a lot of pre-revenue service operations that have to be accounted for.

Discussion

Operations System Expansion Report – No discussion.

Bus Rapid Transit Program – A member expressed concern about the purchase of electric buses because they are in huge demand right now. Another member said it does seem like we are on the leading edge and so has concerns about performance.

East Link Starter Line – A member commented that the confidence level for hiring staff for Lynnwood should continue to be monitored. A member said that it might be difficult to find staff in Snohomish County when King County is doing the recruiting. Another member said the presentation was helpful.

Discussion, Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary, Member Reports

The meeting summary for the July 12 meeting was approved. James reported that Helen is retiring from the COP and recognized her service and all the experience she brought to the COP. Other members also thanked Helen for her service. James presented a plaque to Helen. Joe will miss the next meeting.

In advance of the election for the Chair and Vice Chair positions, COP members were asked to nominate candidates for those positions. Paul Thompson was nominated for Chair and he accepted that nomination. Scott Lampe and Tina Pierce were nominated for the Vice Chair position. Tina accepted and Scott declined the nomination.

James made a motion to approve the nominees by acclamation and that motion was approved and seconded by the COP. Since there was only one nominee for each position, there was no discussion and all members present voted to approve Paul Thompson as the next chair and Tina Pierce as the next vice chair. Paul and Tina will assume their positions at the October COP meeting.

James said that the panel should develop any questions they would like to ask CEO Timm at the September meeting and asked the COP to divide into three groups to brainstorm questions. James requested that representatives from the three groups send their questions to Chris so that he can compile and send them to CEO Timm before the next meeting.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, September 13, 2023, 5:30 – 8:15 PM

- Conversation with CEO Julie Timm
- TBD
- COP leadership election results and discussion