

## Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

**September 13, 2023**

**COP Members Present:** James Peyton, Paul Thompson, Tom Norcott, Tina Pierce, Scott Lampe, Carston Curd, Gabriel Clark, Diana Cambronero Venegas, Donia Zaheri

**COP Members Absent:** Lucas Simons, Joe Scorcio, Charlotte Murry, Lorenzo Frazier

**Others Present:** Adam Montee, Kathy Albert, Chris Hoffman

### **Conversation with CEO Julie Timm**

- Julie Timm, CEO

CEO Timm began by acknowledging she had received seven questions from the COP. She replied to the first question about challenging operations conditions in August. She said that the Royal Brougham crossing project to address sinking tracks resulted in the need to slow down trains through that area. The work had to be done in the dry season and they came up with plans to close tracks for one weekend and then an additional week of one-way operation. They were also able to maintain pedestrian access through the site. They completed seven or eight other projects during that time, which allowed them to avoid shutdowns later. There were some issues during the work related to a shortage of bus operators. They also had to do shutdowns to replace tiles at two stations. Operators were not able to meet twelve-minute headways so they went to 15 minute headways, which impacted riders. They learned that they need to provide realistic expectations to riders about what the headways will be. The work had to be done because loose tiles near operating trains is unacceptable due to safety impacts. Having this work done back-to-back with the Royal Brougham work was difficult on riders. There were also unforeseen issues with the crossover tracks because there were signal issues. CEO Timm acknowledged that they have to do better when communicating with riders.

With regards to the next question about what the most significant climate change issues are, CEO Timm said that transit is a solution to climate change – the more people are on transit the fewer there are in cars. Sound Transit staff added that they have done a lot of work to address vulnerabilities in the system. The majority of climate impacts are minor to moderate, which include heat and flooding. There are likely to be more frequency of minor to moderate impacts; it's just not known when those impacts will be experienced but it is likely between 2050 and 2100. Climate planning is built into system planning. Sea level rise and other impacts are included in alternative screening. Climate vulnerability assessments are done for all projects to identify specific locations that are the most vulnerable. The costs of addressing these vulnerabilities are built into the project and are largely incremental. Sound Transit is also working with its partners to address climate issues.

CEO Timm responded to the next question, how would you rate effectiveness of 2020 fare compliance policy and how can it be improved, by saying that the policy is not adequate although she is willing to see how it works. There are challenges with the policy that will have to be revisited after the agency sees what is working and what is not. Sound Transit is currently experiencing staffing shortages with ambassadors; currently there are 20 and the agency needs 100. They are looking at doing fare compliance on platforms as the trains are too crowded to do compliance effectively. She said fare gates are not the answer due to the expense of installing them. They are currently increasing staffing for security and ambassadors. They are also working on easing complexity of the fare system to make it easier for people to comply. Sound Transit is not the only agency struggling with this issue.

In response to the question, what are you doing as CEO to retain staff, CEO Timm said that she can come back later with more details, but she said that she is doing some things directly. She ensures there is a diverse slate of candidates and she tries to select staff that are the least like her – different backgrounds, cultures, experiences, etc. The agency as a whole is working hard to increase diversity and equity, and to promote and provide space for conversations about race and diversity.

The next question was about professional development for the senior leadership team and herself. CEO Timm said that she surrounds herself with people who are smarter than she is. She has to keep up with courses to keep her AICP and CEP accreditation. She also has a professional coach to help her see what she's doing well and what she can do better. She encourages her leadership team to do the same. They also hold quarterly retreats and workshops to work on awareness, expertise, and culture.

The next question was about the Federal Way Link Extension (FWLE) and what is contributing to the delay of the project. CEO Timm indicated that structure "C" has liquefied soils which resulted in delay because they had to redesign that section. That time cannot be recovered but they are on target to open before the 2026 World Cup. She noted all the openings that are coming up in the next two years, which are all scheduled to occur prior to the World Cup.

In response to the question, where do you see your attention needs to be focused, CEO Timm said that she relies on her executive team to feed her the information in a number of areas so she can help the Board see where changes need to be made. Costs are a big issue to manage, specifically for ST 3. The focus is also on safety and reliability of the system to build trust that the agency can successfully operate the system. She said that she now needs to focus less on internal issues and re-focus on external issues.

A member asked what the biggest surprises have been, positive and negative. She replied that the conflict avoidance within the region is a negative; it is hard to get a straight answer and have hard conversations. She has had to be intentional with conversations and really listen. She has been focusing on building trust and confidence in the team. Positively, it has surprised her how quickly staff have taken on the challenge of making projects succeed. Staff are very invested, and she has been inspired by the dedication of everyone within the organization. Another member asked about the lack of pushback on the Chinese International District (CID) station locations and why the team hasn't challenged the Board more on their decisions. She replied that the station locations look different but do serve the need that was promised to voters. She acknowledged that sometimes her staff do not push back enough and that the north and south CID stations are not perfect. A member asked about landslides and why they weren't identified as a climate change issue. She replied that landslides are a risk, especially in areas where tracks are not elevated. A member asked about fare enforcement and noted that there could be more places to tap cards. The member asked about specific ideas related to fare enforcement. CEO Timm replied that there are more visible and tactile areas that signal that people need to tap. She would like to make an environment where it's more visual and apparent. There are sometimes queues where people have to wait to tap, which is not ideal. More enforcement is also part of the solution and catching people when they are on the platform versus on the train. A member asked about preparation for 2026 World Cup. CEO Timm replied that they have started planning for it and that priority one is getting the system open. She also noted that they need to engage partners to fund more ambassadors and staff to help direct people to use the system who are new to it. They have learned a lot from the All-Star game and the Taylor Swift concert. A member thanked CEO Timm for being here tonight and her patience and passion for the work.

## **Sustainability Annual Report**

- Amy Shatzkin, Director of Sustainability

Staff began by defining sustainability for Sound Transit, which is to move people to more places efficiently, affordable, reliably, and environmentally. This builds on the agency-wide mission. Transit in and of itself is sustainable. Staff said that their annual progress report looks at the previous year, and focusses on key performance indicators and sustainability targets. They also present to the board looking forward to what they want to accomplish. Overall, their goal is to improve quality of life, with a focus on people, the planet, and prosperity to foster a healthy community and a vital economy. In 2022, they completed 76% of their 37 annual targets and they are in the process of completing the remaining targets. Staff throughout the agency are responsible for achieving targets. They support affordable housing through their transit-oriented development projects. There have been key accomplishments related to equity, including launching and implementing their racial and equity toolkit. There have also been significant environmental benefits from transit, including reducing emissions. In practice, they have avoided the emission equivalent of burning 22 million gallons of gasoline. They have advanced their work of achieving carbon free operations. This includes using battery electric buses for the Stride Rapid Transit program. They have also won an award for achieving Envision Platinum status, only one of nine projects in the nation to achieve such recognition. They have also saved money as a result of the sustainability program, saving \$1 million annually.

Staff said that they are also taking steps to make the system more resilient in the face of climate change. They have received recognition for their work at the national and international level. Looking ahead they recognize that they need to continuously improve as they address their priorities. This includes decarbonizing their fleet, addressing carbon in the materials they use for construction, and addressing greenhouse gases. They are also launching an effort to increase electric vehicle charging stations in parking garages. Staff said that all of the sustainability information can be found on the website.

A member asked about the targets and how you know if you have met them. Staff referred to the website, where she highlighted the targets, both regulatory and voluntary. A member asked about what other transit agencies are doing that Sound Transit could learn from. Staff said that they always do market research on any strategy they are developing. Specifically, for buses they met with another agency to see what they have done to reduce bus emissions. They are also looking at Chicago Metro, and other agencies in California and Toronto. A member asked about climate change risk analysis and what they are doing about landslide risk. Staff said they're figuring out how to address wildfire risk, which is relatively new. They are working with County partners to learn what they are doing. They are also evaluating landslide risk, specifically in West Seattle where they are identifying steep slopes and landslide risk. Sound Transit has done a lot of work to reduce landslides on the North Sounder route.

## **Clean Fuel Standard**

- Amy Shatzkin, Director of Sustainability

Staff began with a high-level overview of the state's Clean Fuel Standard (CFS), which came into effect this year. The standard was passed in 2021 and its designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation. The goal is to reduce carbon by 20% by 2034. Staff said that transportation is the largest source of emissions in the state and nationwide. The standard implements a declining carbon threshold over time. Producers can buy credits and/or increase the supply of low carbon fuels like renewable diesel and green hydrogen. Sound Transit can generate credits and revenue through reporting data to the state, receiving credits, and selling credits. Sound Transit generates revenue through efforts such as zero emissions light rail, bus charging, the Tacoma Link Streetcar, and non-revenue fleet EV charging. The costs and benefits of participating in the CFS balance out to be revenue positive. The whole point of the CFS is to have a positive feedback loop. Implementation of the CFS is underway, which has included reporting data to the state. Next steps include completing the draft ST Express and Sounder Zero

Emissions Plan and updating the Sound Transit Sustainability Plan. Revenue from the CFS for the first quarter has been higher than expected, doubling the initial estimate.

A member asked about the carbon credits and whether it just allows the polluters to still pollute, but they just have to pay for it. Staff said that it creates an incentive for more sustainable fuels and increased investment in cleaner fuels. Another member asked if the credits are just an “in” thing and whether it can continue into the future. Staff said that they do see it as part of the long-term solution and pointed to California, which has had the standard for over 10 years and it’s still going strong. A member asked if Sound Transit would benefit the most from these credits, but the numbers seem small and if the people paying are not paying enough. Staff said that the numbers are large enough to help chip away at the cost of electrifying the fleet. A member asked how much the selling price has varied in California. Staff said the sale price started high, but it went down after the market became more saturated. A member asked what the per unit price is. Staff replied they are about \$104 per credit. A member asked if they see any likelihood of the legislature changing the formula for carbon pricing. Staff responded that there is some debate about what is impacting gas prices. The Department of Ecology (DOE) created the formula but unless there is pressure from constituents it is unlikely to change.

## **Discussion**

Conversation with CEO Julie Timm – A member said it was a privilege to have the CEO at the meeting and so it’s important to develop good questions for her. Developing them ahead of time is a good use of time. A member said that there are good avenues for discussion on some of the topics brought up.

Sustainability Annual Report – No discussion.

Clean Fuel Standard – A member commented that the clean fuel saving seems minimal on the grand scale.

## **Discussion, Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary, Member Reports**

The meeting summary for the August 9 meeting was approved. One member asked what the process is for replacing the vacant positions and if the COP has a role in identifying new members. Staff said that the COP can recommend potential members. They are currently recruiting members and collecting applications and they will then pass those applications on to the Board for their consideration. Staff said that they have sent out emails to their community contacts but the main place for the application process is on the website. A member asked if that email can be forwarded to COP members. Staff said that they can send the email, press release, and social media posts on to the COP. James said that as outgoing chair he appreciated the patience, support and help for making the meetings go well.

## **Questions For Next Meeting’s Presenters**

James said that the panel should develop any questions they would like to ask for the upcoming presentations and said that the in-person and online participants would brainstorm questions.

### **Asset management**

- How is the asset management plan progressing for Tacoma Link?
- Will they update us on the procurement of new asset management system?
- What will they do with their old asset management system and the data in it?
- Are they inspecting/assessing the condition of current assets?
- What proportion of the work within the program are contracted out and what parts are internal?
- Who is doing asset management well and what are we learning from them? Are they looking at the highway industry as a standard?

Service plan

- Are they increasing service or holding the line with current level of service?
- What are the plans for ST Express and Sounder and the people who depend on those services?
  - What planning has been done to ensure ST Express is adequate?
- What has been done to recruit and hire more operators and how successful has it been?
- What type of planning are they doing related to special events or surges?
  - How does this fit with the marketing being done to get more ridership?

**Next Meeting:** Wednesday, October 11, 2023, 5:30 – 8:15 PM

- Asset Management Program Update
- Proposed 2024 Service Plan Review