

Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

March 13, 2024

COP Members Present: James Peyton, Paul Thompson, Tom Norcott, Scott Lampe, Lucas Simons, Donia Zaheri, Tina Pierce, Lorenzo Frazier, Diana Cambroner Venegas, Charlotte Murry

COP Members Absent: Gabriel Clark

Others Present: Kathy Albert, Adam Montee, Katie Flores, Chris Hoffman

State Relations and Legislative Agenda

- Alex Soldano – Director of State Relations

Staff began by saying the legislative session ended on March 7 and noted that the 2024 election year will be very eventful with six senators and 20 representatives announcing they are retiring or seeking other offices. Staff said that they expect several hotly contested races. Prior to the session the Sound Transit Board adopted a legislative agenda and the big issues had to do with streamlining permitting and affordable housing and Transit Oriented Development (TOD). Workforce development was another high priority identified in the agenda. Notable bills from the session included new bills and 2023 bills that were not passed. Supplemental budgets were also passed in 2024. Highlighted bills included one about pedestrian crossing, which would allow jaywalking. Staff said the bill did not pass. TOD Housing Development saw a push to allow for larger projects. Legislation on this topic did not pass during the session. Another bill mentioned by staff was one that would allow for the appointment of two citizen representatives on transit boards as voting members. This bill did not pass either, but staff expect to see it again over the next couple of years.

With regards to budget, it was noted that transportation budgets are not in good shape. Gas tax collection is down and other sources are committed elsewhere. Staff mentioned the escalation of cost increases on construction projects. A TOD and workforce housing study was included in the final budget. A permitting and project delivery streamlining bill did pass and will tie in well to Sound Transit's legislative agenda. A rail workforce bill did not make it into the budget. It would have included an educational program to train people to work on rail projects.

In response an advance question about revenues and Board representation, staff said that the Secretary of Transportation was given a place on the Board in recognition of shared partnerships and goals and to ensure coordination among the agencies. In terms of revenue, Sound Transit does not receive revenue from the state but it will receive state money for the Tacoma Dome Link Extension and it is eligible for regional mobility grants. Move Ahead Washington increased the portion of that budget by 2.5 times. The legislature is taking transit and mobility seriously. There may be more grant opportunities in the future given the legislature's priorities. The scale required to make a meaningful impact on Sound Transit's bottom line is quite large and smaller grants to other agencies are likely to have a greater impact. A member asked about the increase in Move Ahead Washington funds and how big it is, and staff replied that it is in the \$160 to \$370 million range. A second question about high-speed rail was also asked and staff said that it is continuing to be studied but noted that the amount of money needed is a challenge but there is interest in moving it forward. Staff mentioned other initiatives all sponsored by the same individuals and includes the Climate Commitment Act. The legislature had the option to leave it as is, introduce "suitable alternatives", or to pass it as is. The legislature passed three of them: the parent bill of

rights, proposing income taxes, and loosening restrictions on police vehicle pursuits. On the Climate Commitment Act, the capital gains tax, and the WA Care healthcare tax the legislature chose to do nothing and those will be on the ballot this November. A member asked about long-term legislative concerns. Staff responded that there are not necessarily concerns that keep coming up on an ongoing basis. There has been one bill related to claims and lawsuits brought against the agency that comes and goes over the years. Another member asked how much subsidy Sound Transit receives from the state and from the federal government for operations. Staff said operating assistance doesn't come from the state and replied that they can get specific amounts that come from the state and federal government. The member asked about the number of staff in his department and if they have lobbyists. Staff said that there are 12 to 13 within his department and they have a contract with a state relations consultant. Another member asked if there was movement on the workforce topic. Staff said he can follow up with specific information but that there were a number of bills on this umbrella issue.

Innovation and Passenger Technology

- Michael Berman – Deputy Director - Research & Innovation

Staff began by introducing the program, which is part of passenger experience department. They have a \$75 fund that focuses on research and innovation. The focus today will be on the technology portion of the program. Staff said they work across the agency to implement projects that help ease pain points and solve problems. They are currently going through a strategic planning exercise. Currently, they are working on passenger facing technology, innovation station program, internal grants, and user experience research, engineering, and design. The passenger program focuses on improving the experience for passengers, including accessible wayfinding, which uses an app to help people navigate through stations for visual and mobility impaired passengers. This is currently a pilot project. The other project is the Sound Ride Guide, which will provide trip planning, notifications, and payment and a mobile chat bot. Staff said they hope to launch the test project in May 2024. Improvements to transit data was also described by staff and includes real time trip planning and integration with other third-party apps.

The Innovation Station Program is an umbrella for a number of pilot project and uses existing facilities to test new initiatives. They started by identifying passenger challenges and come up with ranked options for addressing challenges. One of the projects is the accessible elevators project. They realized that deaf and blind people often don't use the Beacon Hill Station because you have to use elevators and it is hard to know when elevators are present. They are considering an app to help navigate the elevators and plan to field test it before launching. The internal grants program finds people within Sound Transit who have good ideas but don't have funding. They received about 10 submittals for the grants and are considering which ones to move forward with.

User experience research, design, and engineering is new in the transit environment. Research is focusing on how people currently use and want to use the system. An example of this is the eye tracking research program. Special glasses help the agency understand how people interact with signs and other features. They test how people focus on information provided on signs. This data can help with current facilities and future projects. This also has the potential to save the agency money on design and improve the passenger experience.

One member asked about the connection between this work and the work on ORCA and how they recruit people to participate in their studies. Staff responded that there is a bit of a divide between ORCA and the innovation program. This is challenging because multiple agencies are involved in the ORCA program. With regards to study recruitment, staff said that has been a challenge but they are navigating that through bringing on contractors who can conduct the research. Staff said they want to make sure they include

diverse types of riders. Another member asked about the sound ride guide and if it will be integrated with other apps. Staff said it will provide information for all agencies in the region and will supplement other apps. A member asked about virtual reality (VR) and the special glasses and how that works. Staff said that the VR headsets allow people to experience what stations will look like. The glasses will also allow Sound Transit to understand where people are looking within the virtual station and what's catching their gazes. Another member asked if Sound Transit will ever get away from using physical cards. Staff said that a mobile ORCA app is in the works. The sound ride guide app will integrate with the ORCA app so riders can use their phones for everything. A member asked about the program's funding and how long the innovation program has been in place. Staff said that it existed before ST3 but their specific program started in 2020. The member also asked what metrics are used to determine how effective they are. Staff said they are evaluated on how they are contributing to improvements to the passenger experience. There are no specific metrics about how many projects they need to do. Another member asked what projects staff are most excited about. Staff said they are excited about the good maps pilot because navigating a transit system is challenging. Staff are also excited about the ride guide and the "be in be out" payment system.

Parking Program Board Work

- Alex Krieg – Director - Access, Integration & Station Area Planning
- Kevin Shively – Senior Transportation Planner

Staff began by providing an outline for the presentation and then dove into how the fares guiding framework applies to their work. Staff identified the 2023-2024 topic areas and touched on the new fare policy. Staff reviewed the Board direction they have received and specifically the guidance to better manage agency parking facilities. Staff then went into detail about the permit parking program, which was expanded by the Board in 2018 and has goals to maximize ridership and prioritize parking availability. The program has some limitations in that it is limited to only having monthly permits and only being able to manage 50% of parking facilities; the other half has free, unpermitted parking. Parking demand is much lower than it was in 2019, with facilities at 48% capacity in October 2023 compared to 92% in October 2019. Some stations, however, are consistently above 90%, primarily on the existing light rail line. Parking facilities are expensive and parking fees can help offset these costs.

Park and ride users are typically higher income and less diverse than the overall passenger base. Staff said they looked at a number of agencies to see how they price parking. They look to LA Metro the most because of the similarities in the two systems. They focus on managing parking to provide parking to transit users. BART (San Francisco) is also a model that Sound Transit watches closely. RTD (Denver) charges people who do not live in the transit district. Those in the RTD district park for free unless they park for longer than 24 hours. Some takeaways from the peer review include prioritizing parking for transit passengers, most parking programs apply to 100% of parking inventory, and all programs encourage the use of mobile payment but accept cash.

Staff then reviewed the engagement they did with riders and the general public, which included an online open house, outreach to Community Based Organizations (CBOs), focus groups, and a passenger survey. They also targeted areas most likely to be impacted by parking program alternatives. Staff reviewed the different parking program alternatives included payment options, pricing, and reservations. 48% of people they engaged with said they prefer a program with tiered parking prices and reserved parking options. People also said they said the single day general fee was a popular option and carpool options were less popular. Board members were supportive of maintaining a performance-based program, variable pricing, and prioritizing parking for riders. Staff said they are recommending to maintain a performance based program with discounts to low income people and carpoolers, introducing a daily fee, maintaining a

reserved parking option, and phasing implementation with features added over time. Changes to the existing program include expanding parking management goals, expanding scope to allow for daily and special event fees, and reporting back to the Board on program performance. Staff expect improved ridership in the middle of the day and that some people will shift to other modes while others will shift to carpooling, which will increase ridership. They expect annual net revenue of \$4 to \$6 million based on assumptions related to program implementation and cost for administration and enforcement. Implementation will focus on existing and new Link facilities. Staff will ask for Board approval at the March 28 Board meeting. Staff said they plan on educating passengers about the new program and anticipate integrating parking fee payment with ORCA in a future phase.

A member asked about operating and maintenance costs and what that number would be if they include amortized capital costs. Staff said that those costs vary depending on the individual facility. Staff said they can follow up with specific numbers but expect that the range would be \$10 to \$15 a day for parking. Another member asked what simplicity means in this context. Staff replied that it means it's easy for passengers to understand and access parking. They have to balance this with being context sensitive to different areas. A member confirmed that parking in Lynnwood is currently free and asked what will happen when the extension opens. Staff said they have not completed their implementation plan and so they are not sure what they will do yet because they don't know what demand will be. Staff said that Northgate is complicated because Sound Transit owns a parking facility, King County Metro owns a parking lot, and WSDOT owns a parking lot. Lastly, there is also a mall parking garage. Another member asked about payment and how that will work. Staff said that they will not use turnstiles or gates due to high volumes of people coming and going at peak times. There will be open access to the facilities and staff think that just the stated fee will discourage people not using transit from using the facilities. There will be a mobile app that will simplify paying for parking. A member asked if there is a maintenance plan and what that looks like. Staff said that operations and maintenance is in charge of maintaining the facilities, which include both ongoing and more substantive upkeep. A member asked about what will happen if parking is not available. Staff said they will set and adjust rates and will seek options for people to get to the station in other ways besides driving.

Discussion

Parking Program Board Work – A member said they appreciate the thought that went into the program. Another member was curious how prices will be discounted if the fee is only \$2. Staff replied that ORCA Lift has a fare rate of \$1 and so they might use that as an example. Monthly parking might result in a two thirds discount, which is similar to the level of discount offered during the pre-Covid period.

Discussion, Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary, Member Reports, Approval of 2023 Annual Report, Annual Retreat

Paul remembered Joe Scorcio and mentioned how sad it was that he passed away. Other members noted his major contributions, passion, expertise, and willingness to be a mentor to new members. Paul asked if there was a motion to approve the 2023 annual report. It was seconded and was then unanimously approved. The February 14 meeting summary was approved. Scott reported that he attended the Starter Line opening event and said it went well and people seemed excited to have it open in April. Another member noted that trains are test running on the Lynnwood Extension and is looking forward to that opening later this year. Another member was happy to report that they are adding a signaled crosswalk on BelRed Road to improve pedestrian safety near that station. Paul then brought up the annual retreat and noted that the agenda is being finalized and encouraged members to provide input on it. He then mentioned the focus areas and noted that some of the focus areas have not been covered by presenters. He

encouraged members to review the topic list and come to the retreat ready to talk about the proposed topics.

Next Meeting: Annual Retreat - Tuesday, April 2, 2024, 5:30 – 8:15 PM