

Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

Date: February 18, 2026

Time: 5:30 – 7:15 p.m.

Location: Hybrid/Teams/In-person (Union Station)

Attendees

Present:

- Charlotte Murry
- Paul Thomspson
- Tom Norcott
- Mark Lewington
- Scott Lampe

Absent:

- Linda Dorris
- Lorenzo Frazier
- Tina Pierce
- Trevor Reed
- Zak Osborne

Staff

- Adam Montee
- Katie Flores
- Jenny Thacker

Meeting Overview

The Community Oversight Panel (COP) heard a presentation on the System Expansion Cost Savings Workplan. The panel discussed the 2026 annual retreat, ideas for the annual tour, 2026 topics of interest, and the 2025 year-end report. Members also adopted the previous meeting's minutes.

Meeting Summary

The chair began the meeting. The COP administrator took roll.

Presentation:

System Expansion Cost Savings Workplan

The Executive Director introduced himself and explained that his role in Capital Program Delivery focuses on the construction side of the agency. He has been at Sound Transit for 18 months.

The Executive Director placed his presentation in the context of the Enterprise Initiative, which asks agency leaders to look across the organization and identify solutions that will make the system more affordable while still delivering on Sound Transit's commitments. One major opportunity is within the construction and delivery of the capital program itself. His team has already identified more than \$60 million in savings through 2040.

Capital Program Delivery has identified more than 600 cost-saving opportunities. For each opportunity, the team assesses benefits, risks, and impacts and records the findings in a tool

called an opportunity register. Their goal is to identify savings without degrading the service the program will provide.

As projects roll out of the planning into the design phase, it is easier to identify cost savings because the design process needs to include every contingency, and the engineering process gives them an opportunity to find efficiencies. As projects move from planning into design, more savings will be identified. It was noted that big changes, like deferring stations, can unlock further cost savings.

The Capital Program Delivery team divided cost savings into two categories:

- Programmatic opportunities across portfolios
- Project-specific opportunities

For each they identified specific cost-saving levers:

Lever 1: Project-Level Engineering

Savings realized through design optimization and engineering improvements.

Lever 2: Interdepartmental Coordination

Savings that require coordination between Capital Program Delivery and other teams within the agency.

Lever 3: External Coordination

Savings that require Board action or coordination with industry or community partners. These are generally scope reductions.

Lever 4: Phasing

Savings achieved by phasing projects so the agency builds the portions it can currently afford and delays later phases until additional funding becomes available. While every Link project is planned with phasing in mind, implementing phased construction requires Board approval.

The Director provided examples using the Everett, Tacoma, West Seattle, and Ballard programs. The current cost estimate for these projects is \$39.4–\$44.4 billion. By using Lever 1 alone, the Capital Program Delivery team identified potential savings that could result in approximately a 10% reduction in cost

Additional savings include:

- Lever 2 added a 1-13% cost savings.
- Lever 3 added a 10-20% cost savings.
- Lever 4 added a 42-82% cost savings.

The Ballard program is considered the most expensive and complex because it requires tunneling through the downtown core. As a result, modifications to the Ballard program present the greatest opportunity for cost savings.

The Director shared cost savings examples in each lever:

Lever 1 – Project-Level Engineering

Station Optimization, including:

- Station programming
- Design consistency
- Standardization

Examples include:

- Smaller platforms that may also improve passenger flow
- “Right-sizing” stations
- Avoiding tunneling or mining where possible to reduce costs

Lever 2 – Interdepartmental Coordination

- Eliminating tail tracks at a terminus station could reduce cost and schedule impacts by avoiding demolition of the newly built Amtrak Station and Sounder breezeway, potentially saving \$40–\$50 million.
- However, tail tracks support train maintenance, cleaning, and storage, so eliminating them would require coordination with other departments.

Lever 3 – External Coordination

- Station elimination (rather than deferral) is an example of a potential cost-saving lever that requires coordination with outside agencies.
- Eliminating the Avalon Station in West Seattle could allow the agency to create a new alignment that avoids purchasing up to 60 private properties, resulting in potential savings of \$375 million.

Lever 4 – Phasing

- Phasing involves building the portion of the project that current resources allow while delaying additional segments until funding becomes available.
- One example involves the Ballard program, where the agency could initially build the line to Seattle Center or Smith Cove, deferring the extension to Ballard until additional funding becomes available.

The team is also evaluating similar optimizations for smaller projects, such as the Graham Street and Boeing Access Road infill stations.

Additional potential cost savings may come from changes to operations and maintenance facilities (OMF).

Currently, the agency has four planned standalone maintenance facilities serving North, East, Central, and South service areas. The agency could potentially reduce redundancies by having facilities specialize in certain aspects of operations and maintenance.

The Capital Projects team continues to identify additional savings as projects move from design into construction and as coordination continues with the Board regarding project scope and deferral decisions.

Questions and comments:

Panel member: What are the top three cost-saving opportunities?

Presenter: The biggest opportunities have to do with phasing projects and with deferring stations.

Panel member: Is there any reason South Kirkland and Issaquah are not included in these estimates?

Presenter: The projects in this presentation have reached 10% design or greater. South Kirkland and Issaquah are currently at approximately 1% design, which is too early to estimate potential

cost savings. As those projects move along the design process and we get more information, we will be better able to apply value engineering.

Panel member: Can you say more about cost savings decisions in Tacoma and Everett?

Presenter: There are some conversations in Tacoma and Everett about station deferrals.

Panel member: Are there efforts underway to streamline the planning phase?

Presenter: The Transit Advisory Group is making recommendations that help the Board understand the tradeoffs between planning and building and to encourage them to move projects out of the planning phase faster. The Board is seeing, especially in the West Seattle Project, how much money the agency can save by going from the planning phase to the design phase where we can be creative in both solving the engineering challenges while creating efficiencies.

Panel member: At one point there was a conversation about having some simplification in the design phase so you could use the same design in multiple locations. Is that still something that you are considering?

Presenter: We are working on standardization like station prototypes that we can have ready to go. We are also looking at kit of parts, which essentially means not every station door and awning is bespoke. Those kinds of things will help us save money.

Panel member: We talked about these different segments of the build out: Concept, design, planning, building. Are those in the right order?

Presenter: Planning, design and construction are the three big milestones. And within each one there are sub phases. But generally, you plan, design, and build. There is some overlap.

Panel member: How much of the estimated financial gap have you been able to make up if you can implement everything?

Presenter: In these four projects, we have identified a savings of about \$4-5 Billion, without any phasing, and there are lots of other levers the Board has available to bring the gap down. There is still a long way to go to address the gap, but if we add phasing, the problem looks easier to solve.

Panel member: Phasing also creates political and community challenges.

Presenter: That is correct. But Sound Transit is not unique in this. The Washington State Department of Transportation phases projects. Factors such as supply chain disruptions, labor shortages, and global conflicts have increased project costs by 75–100%, making approaches like phasing necessary.

Panel member: Who is responsible for the Enterprise Initiative?

Presenter: Alex Krieg is collaborating with CEO Dow Constantine, who is managing the Enterprise Initiative for the agency

Panel member: What will you be presenting at the Board retreat?

Presenter: The information on Slide 7 is roughly what will be shown to the board at the retreat. The System Expansion committee of the Board just saw this presentation last week. The Board is going to look at three to four scenarios that they can make decisions from.

Panel member: Are they delaying any of the work on the Eastside?

Presenter: I do not know the answer to that, but we are making progress. The Board awarded the contract for the Bus Base North. OMF South continues to move forward. We have not stopped all progress on projects, but for some of the large Link Extension projects, the Board is taking a very measured approach.

Panel member: The Seahawks parade was a great of a test of the system. Are you considering how some of these decisions will impact those kinds of peak use scenarios?

Presenter: When we look at those kinds of crowds, we are looking at Fire/ Life/ Safety and there are no rooms for compromises in those areas.

Staff: From my understanding none of the Bus Rapid Transit projects are in danger of being cut. Those are all in construction and any project that is in construction is in construction and on its own timeline.

Panel member: Three of the four Operations and Maintenance Facilities have been built?

Presenter: Two of four have been built: East and Central

Discussion: 2026 Annual Retreat

The retreat will be held on April 15. The Chair asked if there were items that the other panel members would like to discuss on the retreat.

Panel vacancies

- A panel member addressed the vacancies on the panel and the need to not only fill these vacancies but include members who are able to actively participate. Candidates are approved by the Sound Transit Board, with the COP having no formal role in the selection process. The panel member suggested that as the candidates are approved, representatives of the panel could meet with the Board sub area representatives and give their thoughts on the candidates. The panel member expressed that he would like to have more involvement in the selection process.
- A panel member asked if panel candidates get a copy of the slide deck that staff had prepared on the role of the panel. Staff confirmed that they do not, although they do have access to the information that is on the website.
- A panel member recommended that the finalists be required to attend a meeting as guests. Another suggestion was that the finalists could participate in a Q&A period with the panel during which they could get a better understanding of the work of the panel.
- Staff explained the current selection process and noted that the Board ultimately determines how applicants are considered. They also noted there may be room for flexibility.
- The Chair suggested a conversation with the executive committee to recommend that they help applicants better understand the role of the panel.

Expectations for panel members

- A panel member asked about expectations once members are onboarded, noting that some seats are effectively vacant due to repeated absences. He asked if the COP could set firmer participation requirements.
- Another panel member noted that the City of Everett Commission considers a seat vacant after three consecutive unexcused absences.
- Staff noted that there is a participation clause in the charter, although it has been rarely used to remove panel members.

Role of the COP

A panel member expressed uncertainty about how much influence the panel's recommendations have on Board decisions and asked:

1. Is there anything the panel can take off the Board's plate?
2. What should the panel's role be?
3. What challenges does the Enterprise Initiative face?
4. How can the panel provide useful oversight?

The Chair suggested that she and the Vice Chair can have a conversation with the executive committee to see if that would be of interest to them to get the panel in the decision-making mix. Staff offered to come up with some proposals to bring to Chair Summers.

Guest speakers

A panel member asked if the CEO could attend the retreat so the panel could hear from him and understand how the panel could be useful in implementing the Enterprise Initiative. Staff confirmed that one or two new panel members should be instated by the time of the retreat.

Discussion: Annual Tour

The Chair requested ideas for the annual tour. Suggestions included:

- I-90 Bridge
- STRIDE projects along I-405
- Tacoma Dome Link Extension station areas
- West Seattle
- Sounder service
- Sounder Maintenance Facility

Discussion: 2026 Areas of Interest

The Chair asked panel members to review the list of 2025 topics included in the agenda and come prepared to decide which topics to prioritize for 2026 at the March meeting.

Discussion: 2025 Year-end Report

Staff confirmed that the 2024 report was sent earlier in the week to begin discussions about the 2025 report.

The report has traditionally been sent to the Board in April or May. The Chair suggested finalizing the report during the retreat so it can be presented at the following Board meeting.

The Chair also asked whether there is a video explaining the engineering challenges associated with the I-90 Bridge. Staff recalled that a group called Blueprint produced a video highlighting those challenges and agreed to locate it. There may also be a video describing challenges associated with the Federal Way project.

Staff noted that the agency perspective on those challenges could also serve as a future meeting topic.

Adoption of Previous Meeting Minutes and member reports

A panel member shared that another panel member used Link to attend the Seahawks parade but experienced delays due to a copper wire theft near the Federal Way station.

A motion was made to adopt the previous meeting summary.
The motion passed unanimously.

The Sound Transit Board Retreat will be held March 18 from 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. at the Tacoma Art Museum. The retreat will not be held online, but panel members are welcome to attend and minutes will be taken.

A panel member who attended the 2025 Board Retreat encouraged others to attend.

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.