

Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

Date: April 8, 2026

Time: 5:30 – 8:18 p.m.

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

Attendees

Present:

- Charlotte Murry
- Mark Lewington
- Paul Thomsson
- Scott Lampe
- Linda Dorris
- Lorenzo Frazier
- Tina Pierce
- Trevor Reed
- Fred Jarret
- Thomas Hingson

Absent:

- Zak Osborne

Staff

- Adam Montee
- Katie Flores
- Love Lee

Meeting Overview

The Community Oversight Panel (COP) heard a presentation on the 2026 legislative session, the 2026 service plan, and the Q1 Board Retreat. Members also adopted the previous meeting’s minutes.

Meeting Summary

The chair began the meeting. The COP Administrator took roll. Two new panel members were recently admitted to the panel and joined the April meeting.

Presentation:

2026 Legislative Session Recap

Alex Soldano, the Senior State and Federal Relations Corridor Director, provided a recap of the agency’s legislative priorities and outcomes from the legislative session. Following the prior session, the agency has taken a more proactive approach to advancing three legislative priorities: extending financing authority, reforming permitting processes, and allowing for multiple award task order contracts.

Alex explained that the financing proposal was sometimes referred to as the “75-year bonding bill” for convenience. The purpose was to align state law with federal loan programs that could allow Sound Transit to use longer-term federal financing tools. This bill did not pass this session.

The permitting reform package passed successfully. The reforms are measures intended to streamline project delivery. These changes include allowing certain permits to move forward before full right-of-way acquisition, allowing some permit processes to happen concurrently versus sequentially. The reforms also exempt Sound Transit from local development regulations that govern things like height and setbacks, as long as they abide by them “to the extent practicable.”

The multiple award task order contracts bill did not pass. Alex noted that they are hopeful of refining the language and bringing it back for consideration in a future session. Alex also described an effort to deter copper theft by increasing accountability for scrap yards. That bill did not pass but the agency expects to continue working on the issue.

Questions and comments:

Panel member: Can you talk a little bit more about the copper bill? You mentioned penalties for scrapyards if they purchase copper. How would they determine whether the copper is stolen?

Presenter: Some of that information is intentionally confidential so that criminals are not informed enough to work around it. I can say that part of the requirement added to the bill is photographic evidence when the scrapyards take in copper. The bill also aims to tighten requirements for scrapyards and align penalties across different types of infrastructure theft, so for example, the punishment for stealing from Comcast would be very different than stealing from WSDOT.

Panel member: On the bonding issue, do you know if there are any discussions or concerns about a longer term like 75 years?

Presenter: The intent isn't really to use this as traditional bonding, but to access federal loan programs like TIFIA. Those programs already have safeguards built in, like requiring strong credit ratings and making sure the asset life exceeds the financing term. So those concerns are addressed through the structure of the federal program.

Panel member: What projects would qualify for this 75-year plan?

Presenter: It would likely apply to large, complex projects with long useful lives. A good example is the second downtown tunnel, where you wouldn't want to build it more than once and would design it to last as long as possible.

Panel member: Can you explain a bit more the resistance against the bonding bill?

Presenter: House Democrats were actually the most resistant to taking it up, which defies the typical pattern in Olympia. A lot of that has to do with how much of the transportation budget is currently being financed through bonds. There are also proposals to fund ferry maintenance using additional bonding, which is putting more pressure on that budget. As a result, there is growing concern among House Democrats, and the term "bonding" is starting to carry that negative connotation and hesitation.

Panel member: Would it be helpful for COP members to contact legislators?

Presenter: Yes. Legislators often hear more concerns than support, so direct outreach expressing support can be impactful.

Presentation

Service Planning

Emily Yasukochi, the Director of System and Service Planning, came to provide an overview of Sound Transit's annual service planning process, coordination with transit partners, the adopted 2026 Service Plan, and a pilot program for an overnight bus route.

Emily explained that Sound Transit develops annual service plans on a rolling timeline. Proposals for the following year are developed in advance, followed by public engagement in the summer and Board adoption in the fall. After adoption, Sound Transit coordinates with partner agencies to

implement the approved changes in the next service period. Emily noted that the scale of service changes varies from year to year depending on what is happening in the system, including Link extensions, operational needs, and major events.

Emily shared that Sound Transit coordinates closely with partner agencies, including King County Metro, Pierce Transit, Community Transit, and others when developing these proposals. For example, if a light rail station opens, Sound Transit would coordinate with partners to make sure local transit providers could bring people to the light rail.

Emily described changes to Route 522 as a concrete example. Because the route is being adjusted to better align with future Stride service, Sound Transit worked with Metro to make sure local service would continue to serve Lake City Way and maintain connections for riders. This kind of coordination happens over a year in advance to prepare for these service changes.

Emily then described the 2026 Service Plan, which is divided into two parts. Part One includes minor Sounder schedule changes and the opening of Pinehurst Station. Part Two includes major and minor ST Express changes related largely to Link extensions. The 2026 Service Plan received Board approval in March.

Finally, Emily shared an update on a new overnight bus pilot program called Night Bus. The pilot route, Route 570, now provides overnight service between Sea-Tac Airport and downtown Seattle. This route is an early segment of a larger overnight network that is planned for implementation in the fall. Route 570 is intended to serve riders who need overnight coverage, including many airport employees. Additional overnight routes are planned, including southern and eastside service. The northern route, which will terminate in Everett, will be delayed because Community Transit is not yet prepared to operate it, however, it is expected to be ready by next spring.

Questions and comments

Panel member: Do you also include major events such as the World Cup in the service plan?

Presenter: Yes. We have been working on the plan for the World Cup for over a year. We only bring major service changes to the board. That would be like changing service hours by 25 hours or more, or changing a route which would leave somewhere without service. Things like adding extra service for world cup that we can do at an administrative level.

Panel member: How often do you run into pushback from our partners regarding service change?

Presenter: Not very often, we're often aligned about feeding service into the high-capacity transit network. There is often more pushback from riders than from partner agencies, especially when route changes introduce transfers.

Panel member: I was more curious about pushback regarding cost issues.

Presenter: Our partners are often finding savings from removing routes that would be satisfied by the light rail.

Panel member: Have bus driver shortages improved? What would happen if there was resistance from partners on implementing these changes due to capacity issues?

Presenter: Driver shortages are improving, but there are still challenges. We try to give our partners even more advance notice if we're asking for more of them in the near term to give them more time to prepare. I think our partner agencies are feeling more stable in terms of overall staffing but I do

think they are looking to hire more people. For example, when we told Metro “This is what we’re aiming for in 2026 in the service plan” it was a little more than what they were expecting from us. They took it back and did their calculations and said they could meet our projections but asked us not to add to that.

Panel member: Any reason why there’s a lag between approval and implementation?

Presenter: We made a decision to delay some of the ST Express changes until after the World Cup so we could keep more service in place during that time. It gives us more flexibility to handle large crowds and potential disruptions.

Panel member: How much is the fare for the night bus? And what metrics are you looking at to make sure you want to extend it?

Presenter: Three dollars, it’s the same as our regular bus fare. We really designed this to be more of a coverage service so it’s not going to be ridership based. We aren’t necessarily going to be making decisions on whether to keep or toss these sorts of things. We mostly just want to make sure people are connected to where they need to go.

Panel member: How are you approaching this from a security perspective?

Presenter: We’re coordinating with our security teams and partner agencies. For example, we worked with Metro on where routes should operate downtown to make sure there’s more visibility and support in those areas.

Panel member: How are we helping our partner agencies with security?

Presenter: Security is part of our regular operating agreements with them. It is included in the cost that we pay them for the hours of service they provide. But essentially, they’ll bill us for it.

Panel member: So there is a lot of money passing back and forth between our operating partners and Sound Transit? How much money are we talking about?

Presenter: I don’t have that number off the top of my head, but it’s around \$200 million.

Panel member: I’ve been around Metro for quite a while, it seems like ST is performing a lot of the routes that were once operated by Metro. When ST first started, I thought they would be exclusively light rail but now it seems like they’re getting more into bus infrastructure. Take Stride for example,. How are those decisions made and what goes into that decision making?

Presenter: I don’t have the total history on how the decisions were made but we have defined ST Express as connecting regional center. So, if it is a bus route that connects a regional center, we consider it an ST express route.

Panel member: How is it more efficient for Sound Transit to operate high volume routes but then contract those routes back to Metro to operate them? Who makes those decisions?

Presenter: We’re not making those decisions right now. They were made in the 90s and were part of the creation of Sound Transit.

The panel adjourned for a break at and returned at 6:55 p.m.

Presentation:

Board retreat and enterprise initiative recap

Alex Krieg, the Deputy Executive Director of Enterprise Planning came to provide a recap of the recent Sound Transit Board retreat and update on the Enterprise Initiative, Sound Transit's agencywide effort to address long-term affordability challenges in the ST3 program.

Alex provided a high-level overview of the context of the Enterprise Initiative for the two new panel members. He explained that the agency has identified approximately \$34.5 billion in needed revenue and/or savings to fully deliver the ST3 system plan. The Board has been engaged in this issue since 2025 and has adopted guiding principles to inform the work.

The recent Board retreat focused on reviewing possible capital program approaches and discussing trade-offs. Alex emphasized that the approaches shown to the Board were not final proposals, but illustrative tools meant to provoke discussion and help staff better understand Board priorities.

Alex explained that the first step is to identify an affordable system plan overall. Once that is done, the agency can make additional adjustments to ensure compliance with subarea equity requirements.

Alex then described three broad approaches discussed with the Board.

- One approach focused on maintaining momentum on active light rail extension projects already in planning or design, including West Seattle, Ballard, Everett, and Tacoma Dome, while deferring or phasing other investments.
- Another approach similarly emphasized light rail but deferred West Seattle in order to advance other projects further.
- A third approach phased all light rail extensions, delivering smaller initial segments while preserving more of the overall ST3 program, including some parking and infill station investments.

Several themes arose from the Board's discussion. These included

- A strong commitment to ST3 as a regional program
- Broad support for prioritizing light rail investments over some other categories of investment
- Strong interest in maintaining momentum on projects already underway

Alex also said there was recognition that projects further out in the program, such as South Kirkland-Issaquah and the Tacoma T Line extension, are difficult to assess without more early planning work.

The Board recognized there will need to be difficult choices, including the possibility that some projects or project phases may be deferred. Alex emphasized that there was interest in developing a more dynamic approach to program management so the agency is not forced into repeated affordability resets every few years.

Staff are now working to develop a modified capital program based on the Board's feedback. This includes maintaining momentum on active projects, bringing some early planning work into the affordable plan for future projects, and identifying where partnerships or other strategies may help deliver investments.

Alex also discussed public engagement now underway, including an online survey and outreach at town halls. Staff plan to return to the Executive Committee with a package of recommendations.

Questions and comments:

Panel member: Have you looked at partnerships with the developers that are building in these station areas?

Presenter: Yes, absolutely we are. Joint development falls under exploring public and private opportunities which is one of the approaches we're looking at.

Panel member: Has there been any discussion about what the system looks like if you don't build the second tunnel? That must be the most expensive part of what still needs to be done.

Presenter: There was a robust discussion about that question. It first came up at the August 2025 board meeting. Board member Balducci basically asked us if we really need this second tunnel and if we do not need it, what might we do alternatively? We looked at a couple of options, including building an alternative between Ballard and Westlake. That required putting two lines in the existing tunnel. We also looked at inner lining. The trade offs are

- It might require a new maintenance facility
- Interlining carries tremendous construction risk and would force a long-term closure of a segment of the existing tunnel
- It would also close 3rd Avenue for an extended duration.
- Another risk is basically having to start the Ballard project all over again which carries an environmental risk.
- All our environmental documents for projects like Everett, Tacoma Dome, and West Seattle were predicated on the new tunnel investment. So, it's very likely that it would have impacted their schedules too.

In the end we realized that there is too much process risk for not enough cost savings.

Panel member: How is that allocated in terms of subarea equity?

Presenter: That is a great question. The Ballard project is SODO to Market St. It is effectively two projects in terms of accounting purposes, because it falls under two subareas.

- There is a portion of it that is Market Street to just north of Denny Station, that is a North King County only investment. That is the part of the project that is fully paid for by residents in that subarea.
- Then there is a segment just north of Denny Station to just north of the SODO station. That's the regional investment.

So, the way that the costs are allocated is 51% to North King. 14% to East King, 13% to South King and Snohomish, 8% to Pierce. 1% is allocated to the system wide category. There are North King board members who feel that they are paying more than their fair share for the regional investment that is the new tunnel in downtown Seattle.

A panel member had a comment about integrating AI in the permitting process, noting some interesting work that the City of Bellevue is doing as a possible example.

A panel member shared appreciation about the ease and efficiency of open payment for fares.

A panel member suggested Sound Transit prioritize parking investments.

Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary

A motion was made to adopt the previous meeting summary, one comment was made to include Tom Norcott in the attendees list.

Discussion: 2025 Year-end Report

Due to time constraints, the Chair and Sound Transit staff agreed to modify the COP retreat agenda to allow more time for the 2025 year-end report since the panel did not have time to cover it during this meeting.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 8:15 p.m.