

Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

Date: June 10, 2026

Time: 5:30 – 7:44 p.m.

Location: Teams

Attendees

Present:

- Charlotte Murry
- Mark Lewington
- Paul Thomspen
- Scott Lampe
- Linda Dorris
- Fred Jarrett
- Tom Norcott
- Tom Hingson

Absent:

- Zak Osborne
- Lorenzo Frazier
- Trevor Reed
- Tina Pierce (excused)

Staff:

- Adam Montee, Sound Transit
- Katie Flores, Sound Transit
- Love Lee, PRR

Meeting Overview

The Community Oversight Panel (COP) heard a presentation about the Fare Gate Pilot Program from Brian de Place (Executive Direction of Security & Fare Engagement) and Gavin Schaefer (Design Director). The Panel also discussed the 2025 Annual Report.

Meeting Summary

The chair began the meeting. The COP administrator took roll. The chair introduced Brian and Gavin to begin presenting the Fare Gate Pilot Program.

Presentation:

Fare Gate Pilot Program

The Board directed staff in December to study a fare gate retrofit pilot and report back in Q2. Since then, Sound Transit has brought on a consultant, completed most of the analysis, and plans to release the final report later this month.

Presenters explained that the light rail was originally designed as an open, barrier-free system, supported by fare enforcement. Over time, Sound Transit moved away from punitive enforcement toward education and engagement after concerns were raised about undesirable enforcement outcomes. Fare gates are now being considered as a way to improve fare compliance.

An exploratory fare gate study showed positive return on investment if focused on key stations. The study found that fare gates make financial sense at stations where ridership is highest. The pilot program would include up to 14 stations, including end-of-line stations, major transfer stations, and high-ridership Seattle stations. The study estimates construction costs between \$79.3 million and \$88.2 million, with a payback period of approximately two to five years depending on the scenario. After that payback period, Sound Transit could see around \$30 million or more in net revenue compared to current compliance rates.

The pilot would likely use bidirectional fare gates, meaning riders would tap in and tap out. Ticket vending machines would be placed inside fare-paid zones so riders who forgot to pay could buy fare media before exiting. Staff also discussed accessibility, youth riders, ORCA LIFT, fare media upgrades, and the continued role of fare ambassadors. Fare ambassadors would shift toward more passenger support and gate assistance, while still supporting fare compliance where needed.

If the Board moves forward, next steps would include community engagement, an accessibility and equity review, further design work, procurement, and eventual installation. Staff would evaluate the pilot at years one, three, and five and return to the Board with recommendations to maintain, expand, adjust, or end the pilot.

Questions and comments:

Panel member: How will this be socialized or communicated to the public so people are aware of what is getting ready to happen?

Presenter: We do have some social media posts already, and we've been working closely with our communications team. The engagement strategy is something we're already working closely on from the Sound Transit staff side. If the Board makes a decision to move forward, we would have a couple of years until implementation. That gives us a good opportunity to identify community members, work with the traveling public, and work with any specific community members we want to target to make sure they are aware of how to ride and how to appropriately access the system.

Panel member: Is the timeline you presented going to give you enough data points for the Board to make a decision on future design and unbuilt ST3 stations, so Sound Transit can avoid change order problems later?

Presenter: One of the things shown on the slide is the discussion about incorporating faregates into ST3 station designs. That decision is not settled yet. In a previous role, I worked across the program to make sure we were space-proofed and had power and data conduits to support future fare gates, so we are pretty well set up. If there is Board action, it would allow us to incorporate fare gates into final design. If fare gates are not desired later, it is much easier to remove them from design assumptions than to add them. Adding them now is a low-risk option that provides future flexibility. The longer we wait, the more we preclude future flexibility.

Panel member: Will you look at whether fare gates could reduce staffing requirements at stations, since fare ambassadors may shift more toward customer service?

Presenter: Right now, in terms of our frontline staffing model, we do not really have a consistent station ambassador function. We have about 60 fare ambassadors authorized in the 2026 budget. When you think about revenue service hours, three shifts a day, and multiple station entrances, the need becomes much greater than 60. This would allow us to use existing staffing more effectively. Most systems with fare gates usually have some human presence, especially during early implementation, to make sure everything is operating smoothly. We do not have plans to reduce

staffing, but this would allow us to focus existing staff without needing to keep expanding staffing levels.

Panel member: There may be pushback if free youth ORCA cards become required, because youth transit is supposed to be a no-barrier system. How are you thinking about that?

Presenter: That is fair feedback. We are looking at other agencies with similar models, and they have leaned into distributing free cards. We do not want to make it harder to ride the system. This is also an opportunity to build future habits. If we can do distribution really well and partner with school districts and others, and use fare ambassadors to help people navigate the system early on, there may be a path forward. It will not be straightforward at first, but if the Board moves forward, we will have a couple of years to work through those challenges.

Panel member: Given that Sound Transit historically did not have fare gates, and the ROI now appears to be good, what was the original rationale for not having fare gates?

Panel member: I do not have all of the history, but I spoke with someone who was an early Sound Transit employee. At the time, in the 1990s, part of the analysis had to do with the cost of collecting physical money. Security trucks were picking up change and dollars and transporting them to secure environments. It was not a tap system. When they looked at the total cost of ownership, including staffing requirements, the investment was massive. That was part of what led them to a barrier-free system paired with enforcement. Technology has changed a lot in the last 30 years, and that is why we are seeing more North American transit agencies adopt this technology now.

Presenter: Do we have any idea how many youth are currently riding the system?

Panel member: The last time it was measured was when youth fares were still required, and that was around 6%. At this point, we do not really know because we do not have a mechanism to measure it. Once the payment requirement was removed, it probably would not be less than 6%, so you could extrapolate at least 6%, maybe a couple percentage points higher.

Presenter: Could Sound Transit incorporate a card that works for both the library system and the transit system, since many youth already carry library cards?

Panel member: That is a really interesting idea. It is similar to when you go to a new city and get a city pass. Maybe we could do the same for youth. This is the kind of discussion we want to encourage so we can come up with solutions that make it easy and intuitive for people to access the system.

Presenter: Could phone tap options help youth access the system?

Panel member: Phone taps could be useful, especially once they are available beyond Android and eventually roll out to Apple. Many kids are not far from their phones. But not all kids have phones, so that is the other side of the coin. We may need to think about targeting different fare media to different age groups or demographics.

Presenter: Do we really need a full five years of data to decide whether the pilot is working? That seems like a long period of time.

Panel member: There are a number of ways to evaluate a pilot. One, three, and five years feels like a rational starting point. In year one, you are working out the kinks, and by year three, hopefully the system is operating well. If the Board asks for a recommendation, that is an opportunity for them to say they want the pilot to be more structured, discrete, or shorter. This is a starting point for a

conversation about the duration, scope, and scale of the pilot.

Presenter: The longer pilot timeline seems like it could overlap with decisions on future stations, especially West Seattle stations. How will that be handled?

Panel member: That is good feedback. As we refine the proposal, we can make sure we are clear that the outer years of the pilot may affect or overlap with other decisions.

Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary

A motion was made to adopt the May meeting summary. It passed unanimously. The Chair called for a 15-minute break and the panel reconvened at 6:28 p.m.

Discussion: 2025 Year-end Report

The Chair introduced the latest version of the 2025 annual report for discussion. Key changes to the report include:

- Revise and reduce redundancy between the discussion of vacancies and membership process in the Governance section.
- Reorganize subsections and elevate panel vacancies and membership process ahead of agency leadership engagement.
- Add language to emphasize the panel's request to be involved in future recruitment efforts and recommendations.
- Adding language that recognizes the Board's actions and organizational reforms as positive steps towards addressing the Enterprise Initiative.
- Add language that expresses support for the proposed Faregate Pilot Program in the Farebox Recovery section.
- Add language clarifying that fare enforcement remains important before and during implementation of the Faregate Pilot Program.
- Recommend including elevator and escalator reliability metrics in future agency dashboards.
- Revise the Project Schedule and Budget Adherence section by replacing references to "future station openings" with broader language related to future extensions or project delivery.

For next steps, the Chair and COP administrator will revise the report based on panel feedback and distribute a final draft for review before finalizing and advancing the report through Sound Transit review.

Other business

The panel discussed several topics for future consideration. Members requested additional information regarding recent changes to interest allocation under the Board's financial plan resolution and expressed interest in a future presentation on subarea equity and the implications of recent financial plan changes. Members also discussed the value of hearing from outside experts and partner organizations during future meetings to provide additional perspectives on topics before the panel.

The panel expressed interest in receiving a post-World Cup passenger experience debrief and discussed recent reports identifying Sound Transit as the highest-ridership light rail system in the country. Staff provided additional context regarding the methodology used to make those

comparisons. Members also requested updates on potential impacts to Sound Transit funding resulting from recent federal policy changes.

Additional discussion included elevator and escalator reliability, signage and wayfinding at Lynnwood City Center Station, and ongoing efforts to improve audio quality for hybrid meetings.

The meeting adjourned at 7:44 p.m.