

Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

October 11, 2023

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

COP Members Absent: Carston Curd, Gabriel Clark

Others Present: Adam Montee, Katie Flores, Chris Hoffman

Asset Management Program Update

- Vivian dela Rosa – Director of Enterprise Asset Management
- Vivian Wei – Deputy Director of Transit Assets
- Stephanie Ratko – Director of Business Transformation

Staff began by introducing the agenda, which is based on the questions provided by the COP. Staff began with an update on Tacoma Link Asset Management Plan and indicated that the update represented a continuation of the December 2022 presentation. Staff said the Asset Management Plan for Tacoma Link is 40% completed and was chosen as a pilot project. The plan provides recommendations for a proactive approach to asset management. Staff said it is targeted for completion by the first quarter of 2024.

On the next topic, the procurement of the new asset management system, staff provided an update on what has been accomplished in 2023. They are in phase 1 of phase 3, which is the procurement phase. They will hire a consultant in early 2024 to help guide the process and to get ready for system implementation. The cost is \$70-\$100 million. Phase two involves procurement of the software and change management. Implementation, phase 3, will take between four and six years. The Request for Proposals (RFP) for selecting a consultant is currently out for bid. There are a number of firms who have indicated interest in the RFP. Staff said they plan to award the contract in early 2024. A COP member asked about the vendors' experience with other transit systems in the world or United States. Staff indicated they will know more once proposals are submitted late this month.

On the third topic, the old Asset Management system, staff said they will launch a data migration plan to ensure that all data is preserved and is migrated to the new system.

On the fourth topic, Inspection and Condition Assessment of Assets, staff said they will provide a high-level review of all assets. Staff started with tracks and the key inspection activities they undertake. These include weekly walks of tracks, rail grinding, and eddy current detection. With regards to bridges and tunnels, staff said they follow Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) standards and do a number of inspections on various schedules. Staff said bridges and tunnels are complex systems, so it is important to inspect them to make sure they are safe. Staff then walked through the database they use to track conditions. The database allows them to prioritize which assets need to be addressed first. Staff then talked about facility and system assets. They conduct routine facility preventive maintenance and perform regular assessments, typically on a monthly basis. They also do a more comprehensive assessment every three years. For systems, they are putting a new assessment system in place that will help them better track systems. Staff presented a heat map that included scores for all facilities. This allows them to measure rankings against Sound Transit targets. Staff showed additional charts that document asset conditions where they assign ratings for each facility.

On the fifth topic, staff responded to the question about what portion of the asset management system is managed by Sound Transit and what portion is managed by consultants. Staff indicated that there are four full-time Sound Transit staff and that they have an on-call management consultant. Staff talked about the Asset management timeline and referenced that the Development (Phase 1) is completed and that Phase 2 (Implementation) is underway.

On the sixth topic staff responded to questions about learning from other organizations. Staff said they learn from other organizations by networking and through professional associations. In response to a questions from the COP about learning from the highway industry, staff said they do not typically network with the highway industry; they recognized some missed opportunities.

A COP member asked about the new software and if it will be applied to the Tacoma Link and what happens to the rest of the operating system and does it include buses. Staff said that the Tacoma Link Plan does not affect other systems. They do cover vehicles in the Enterprise Asset Management System (EAMS), and it will be moved over to the new system once it is launched. A member asked about how many databases they have, and staff responded that it is one system both currently and in the future. Another member asked about facility conditions indicators focusing on marginal and poor facilities, and how staff makes sure they don't just focus on those. Staff said they focus on bringing facilities that are below target up to standard. They also look at facilities that are trending down and try to get those back into good condition. They balance trying to keep everything in a state of good repair and bringing up substandard facilities, especially those that they inherited from other agencies. Another member suggested that there may be opportunities to rehabilitate assets to extend the life of the assets. Staff said they are currently doing that to get more life out of current assets.

Another member asked about inspections that are being conducted and how long they have been collecting this information. Staff said they started in 2016 based on Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requirements. They are also looking at trends within the data. A member asked about assets' typical useful life and how that plays into their assessments. Staff said they often recalculate useful life depending on the actual conditions of assets; it's not only age-based. A member asked about how this system connects with the human resources and finances side of things. Staff said there is not a great connection between this system and human resources. They need to be able to assign human resources to issues when changes with assets arise. The finance system is connected. They are working to better integrate the systems, so they have a more holistic view over time. A COP member commented about the connection between asset management and how much things cost when they do need to replace assets. A member asked about staff experience with other organizations and what challenges are specific to Sound Transit. Staff said there are opportunities at Sound Transit where they can improve their systems. The organization is primed for change and giving staff the channels they need to get from point A to B. It is a large organization, and they must be careful not to pivot too fast. Staff said there are close to 3,000 people who are working for Sound Transit in one way or another. A member commented about renewal work by contract and that contractors can be reluctant to share cost breakdowns. Staff said they experience this but do try to get contractors to break down costs. Staff said they have noticed an improvement in contractors providing costs for each asset. Staff commented that they have to consider how disruptive construction will be to riders when they have to repair or replace assets. A member commented that there is a lot of information to track, and that there must be a best of class asset management system and to consider that when the agency makes decisions about the asset management systems. Staff said that they do not want to be a test case. They also learn from other organizations and are building that into their program.

Proposed 2024 Service Plan Review

- Brian de Place – Director of System and Service Planning

Staff began by saying they are here to provide a status report of ST Express service plan and an overview of the 2024 draft Rail Service Plan. Staff noted that ridership continues to grow, particularly in the last six months or so. Link has contributed to a lot of that growth with some days outpacing pre-pandemic ridership levels. Staff said they have engaged with the Board and the public on the 2024 Service Plan and provided an overview of those at different touch points. Staff identified the revised ST Express Plan and the current plan to defer the ST Express Plan until Lynnwood Link opens and to give time to address ongoing staffing issues. Staff then talked about the new rail service coming online, specifically the East Link starter line and the extension from Northgate to Lynnwood. Combined, this will result in twelve new stations coming online. The East Link starter line will have 8 new stations over 6.3 miles and will provide service every 10 minutes, 16 hours a day. The Lynnwood extension will have four new stations and extend light rail into Snohomish County. They plan on providing service every 8 to 10 minutes during peak times and 10 to 15 minutes mid-day and early morning and late evening. Staff said they need to address crowding that is forecasted to occur when these lines open and that is included in the service plan. They plan on adding more trips on Sounder North to address forecasted crowding and they will then revisit how ST Express can mitigate crowding.

Staff summarized the public outreach results from this summer. They saw support for the starter line, the Lynnwood Extension, and ST Express service. Staff said they will be requesting Board approval for the service plan later this October. Staff also reviewed their Title VI analysis, which has to be conducted 6 months before service begins. No disparate impacts were identified as a result of the analysis, so no mitigation is required. For next steps, they will request that the Board adopt the service plan, continue to evaluate ST Express and propose ST Express Service Plan in early 2024. Staff said the full Draft Service Plan is available on the Sound Transit website (that link was provided to COP members).

A member asked about ridership charts and why some weekday ridership drop-offs occurred in late-2021 and late-2022. Staff said it could be attributed to winter and to new COVID variants that were present at those times. A member asked about the planned openings and how the graphs look when you look at them from a per service mile perspective, given that new service is coming online. Staff responded that it is difficult to do an apples-to-apples comparison because some ST Express routes were eliminated or reorganized. They are approaching 2019 ridership on ST Express even with fewer trips. They are seeing demand on ST Express even with lower than desired service levels. There is also more demand on Link, which is as expected since more rail service has come online.

Discussion

Asset Management Program Update – A member said he was pleased with the presentation and that it was better than previous presentations on this topic. He added that it looks like they are considering the right data and planning for success on an appropriate timeline. Specifically, the member said that the data collection looks good, which makes him feel optimistic about next steps. Another member said that he was impressed with the presentation and that the questions asked by the COP were right on target. A member noted that the International District Station faces a lot of challenges based on its age. Overall, it seems like they are on the right track. Another member said that the explanations provided were helpful. Another member asked about how they plan for big events and how they compare to peak ridership, and is the system that stressed that it results in multiple missed trips. Staff said the goal is to provide as much service as possible during big events in a finite amount of time. Staff also said that they work with their service partners to provide service; sometimes they can't provide the number of operators that are needed. A member asked if the service plan will be able to address the special events issues. Staff said that the service plan will focus on what the typical day looks like. Special events are addressed more on an operational level, with the intent to provide as much service as possible. Another member asked about the shortage of operators and what Sound Transit is doing to attract operators. Staff responded that the service plan focuses on understanding what the limited resources are. Once they understand the limiting factors, they then develop a plan that can be delivered reliably; the schedule has to match reality. Staff also said

that operator shortages are at a historic level and that there are usually more drivers than open positions. They are using a lot of methods to try to attract people, including bonuses and recruiting at community colleges. Sometimes they lose bus operators to the rail system. There is also a paradigm shift from the types of jobs that younger people want to do. There is less interest in the younger generations in this type of work.

A member of the COP asked if the drivers are unionized, and staff replied that they are. A member asked about the starting pay for drivers. Staff said they typically start at about \$28 an hour plus benefits. Once drivers pass training, pay gets bumped up to \$29 or \$30 an hour, plus the opportunity to work overtime. The member asked about pay for train operators. Staff said they did not know but a COP member said that train operators earn the same pay. A member asked about 2025 and when East Link will be operational and if there still will be capacity issues. Staff said that when the 2 line is fully open, they expect that will address some of the crowding issues. They do expect some crowding when Federal Way opens in 2026. Staff continued that they have had to add more trains as the Northgate extension has come online. Overall, especially on Link, they are experiencing high ridership. Staff also said that the PM peak is higher than AM Peak. PM peak now occurs earlier than pre-pandemic. Another member commented on the weekend ridership patterns and asked about weekend headways. Staff said that people are using the system for more than just commuting. Headways on weekends are 10 minutes and it has been busy. A staff member commented that the 594 was very busy on a previous weekend but that it worked well. A member asked about ST Express and how it compares to light rail experience, considering that ST Express will more or less duplicate Link. Staff said that it is like a relief valve; they are considering whether to continue that or to push people towards Link. There are tradeoffs, but they want to provide as many options as possible, especially until the full 2 line is open.

Proposed 2024 Service Plan Review – A member said they were happy to hear that they are adjusting the ST Express side and paying attention to ridership and capacity. Another member said he is interested in seeing what the ridership will look like on the starter line. A member asked for clarification about what the 1 and 2 lines are. A COP member clarified the difference between the two. A member asked if there would be some way to compare, something like on a seat by mile basis.

Discussion, Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary, Member Reports

The meeting summary for the September 13 meeting was approved. Paul asked members to send questions on the next meetings topics within a week of this meeting.

A member reported that a recent trip from Northgate to the Airport went well and he felt safe. Another member noted that on a recent ride he and a number of other riders were not asked for a fare.

Questions For Next Meeting's Presenters

Paul previewed the topics for next month's meeting and indicated that the current Budget and Financial Plan are on the website. He also noted that the COP would be receiving a presentation on the potential audit topics. Paul asked if anyone had any questions they would like to ask next month's presenters. COP members identified the following questions:

2024 Proposed Budget and Financial Plan

- Can you summarize how subarea equity balances out over the period of the plan?
- What assumptions do you use for the financing of West Seattle and Ballard?
- Give the operator shortage, what are the assumptions for paying operators?
- What are the assumptions on gas prices and how is that expected to affect the financial plan?

Next Meeting: Wednesday, November 8, 2023, 5:30 – 8:15 PM

- 2024 Proposed Budget and Financial Plan
- Internal Audit Division Update
- COP Discussion on Annual Performance Audit Recommendation