

## Sound Transit Citizen Oversight Panel Virtual Meeting Summary

February 16, 2022

**COP Members Present:** Fred Auch, Scott Lampe, James Peyton, Helen Powell, Larry Sauve, Joe Scorcio, Paul Thompson

**COP Members Absent:** None

### **COP Member Introductions/Reflections**

COP members discussed the impacts of the pandemic on Sound Transit and on their work as Panel members. While the Agency and the COP have continued to function well, most members looked forward to the time when they could meet again in person.

### **Discussion with Board Chair Keel and CEO Peter Rogoff**

- Chair Kent Keel
- CEO Peter Rogoff

CEO Rogoff noted that the internal audit division had released its draft report regarding the service outage that occurred when a crowded Link train was disabled in a tunnel north of the University of Washington following the Apple cup football game on November 26, 2021. The cause of the outage was identified as a rod protruding upward between the rails far enough to snag a cable that served as the train's electronic spine. The rod was one of many in place in the track beneath the University of Washington (UW) to help prevent electromagnetic interference at the UW's research labs.

The audit found that the contractor for the particular section of track had failed to follow design instructions to cut the rods. Sound Transit also made errors during the commissioning process when it failed to note that the rods had not been properly shortened and when it failed to test simulate heavy passenger loads like those following the Apple Cup. Although King County Metro had noted and begun to repair damage to the bottom of trains caused by the protruding rods, the problem was not sufficiently expedited or complete by the time of the incident. Sound Transit and King County are working aggressively to improve work processes, which includes creating a new executive oversight team to ensure that every audit finding is fully addressed.

Current conditions in the transit operating environment are particularly challenging, as recent media reports have made clear. As a majority of employees throughout the region continue to work from home, a different group of riders is using the system. While many riders pay their fares and behave appropriately, a sizable number of others are homeless, addicted, or mentally ill. Health and safety issues for operators and riders have become an increasing concern. There

has also been a marked increase in fare evasion, which, combined with fare engagement policies and free fares during the height of the pandemic, has led to a significant loss in revenue. A Board workshop to address these issues will likely take place in the weeks ahead.

Chair Keel noted that the Board continues to have significant work ahead in a number of areas. The COP's engagement is important for the Agency's overall success. Pending changes to the COP's recruitment process and meeting times will help attract a more diverse group of panelists and make meetings more accessible for those who participate either virtually or in person.

In response to a question regarding interjurisdictional relationships, Chair Keel, President of the Association of Washington Cities, noted that there are 51 cities within the Sound Transit district and 51 different relationships. Cities naturally want local control of what takes place within their city limits. Cities also issue the permits Sound Transit needs to build and operate its projects. A balance must be struck that honors the needs of local jurisdictions while keeping the Agency's projects moving forward on budget and schedule.

### **COP Refresh and Meeting Schedule**

- Kathy Albert – Chief Strategic Officer
- Katie Flores – Board Administrator

Kathy Albert recapped proposed changes to the COP that have been discussed in previous meetings. Moving from twice monthly weekday morning meetings to one monthly weekday evening meeting would be the biggest change since the COP's inception 25 years ago. If, as anticipated, the Board accepts the proposed changes, recruitment for the eight current vacancies will begin in April as will the evening meeting schedule.

There was discussion of the proposal to have three staff presentations per meeting, each about 50 minutes in length, including 10 minutes for questions and five minutes for a break. It was agreed that the meetings would be held on the second Wednesday evening of each month, from 5:30 to about 8:15 PM. When in person meetings become possible, remote attendance will still be an option. COP members expressed hope that the changes would lead to the desired goal of a more diverse panel, as well as a full complement of Panel members. The COP has operated with only seven members for the past two years. It was noted that the new schedule is worth trying and could be adjusted in the future if the desired outcomes are not attained.

### **Discussion**

Panel members thanked Chair Keel and CEO Rogoff for their participation, which was much appreciated.

The 2021 draft year-end report was approved with minor changes. The 2021 focus areas were revised and adopted for 2022.

Approval of the February 2, 2022, virtual meeting summary was deferred until the March 2, 2022, COP meeting.

**Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the COP was set for March 2, 2022, 8:30 – 11:00 AM.