

## Sound Transit Citizen Oversight Panel Virtual Meeting Summary

**March 2, 2022**

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

**COP Members Absent:** James Peyton

**Others Present:** Kathy Albert, Katie Flores, Adam Montee

### **Employee, Consultant and Operator Availability**

- Julie Honeywell – Chief Human Resources Officer
- Ted Lucas – Chief Procurement and Contracts Officer
- Suraj Shetty – Executive Director of Operations

Sound Transit staff discussed the Agency’s multifaceted recruitment strategy, which includes extensive advertising and outreach through posting to more than 100 sites, participation in a variety of job fairs and advertisements in trade publications such as those of the American Public Transportation Association, the Women’s Transportation Seminar and the like. Creating a positive candidate experience during the recruitment process helps build a strong pool, as does promotion from within the Agency, which currently accounts for 35 percent of advancement. Acceptance rates are currently 88 percent overall. Openings, most of which are added staff, have remained slightly above 100 since 2021. The Agency’s retention rate is 91 percent.

A contractor vaccination mandate program took effect on October 15, 2021. The program requires the Agency’s contracted workforce to be fully vaccinated, consistent with vaccine requirements for employees. In all, 222 companies attested their compliance with the mandate. Three companies that did not attest were subject to mitigation measures for workers whose duties were performed outside or alone. No service disruptions have been experienced as a result of the requirements, which apply equally to all new contract awards.

The current security guard contractor continues to have difficulty filing posts. The Agency has issued supplemental contracts to meet public safety requirements. A new security services request for proposals is being prepared for advertisement in the coming weeks. Recruitment and retention challenges also impact the fare ambassador program. Ambassadors report harassment and occasional threats that riders have also experienced in the current operating environment.

Ongoing operator shortages have led to reduced service on ST Express. A general shortage of key staff is reducing the capacity to secure, maintain and clean stations and vehicles. While most daytime riders have a safe and reliable experience, problems are acute at times of lower ridership and staffing. The Agency is planning for increased ridership as employees return to in person work, which is expected to help alleviate some of the existing security concerns.

### **November 26, 2021, Link Incident**

- Patrick Johnson – Audit Director

Patrick Johnson summarized the findings of an audit to determine the causes of train damage and stoppage and the effectiveness of communications when a link train became disabled in a tunnel north of the University of Washington Station following the Apple cup football game on November 26, 2021. The outage occurred when a Series 2 train struck a protruding electromagnetic interference (EMI) rod protruding upward between the rails, which severed cables beneath the vehicle. 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.

Communications failures also took place that led to passengers beginning to self-evacuate from the dark and unventilated train after four minutes without any announcements from the crew. Some tunnel cameras and station public address systems were also inoperable on the night of the event.

The audit found that pre-revenue testing processes had not fully considered clearance differences between the Series 1 and Series 2 vehicles under all possible operating conditions. Previous rod strikes and non-disabling vehicle damage were being reported by maintenance staff but were not properly escalated prior to the incident.

As a result of the audit findings, the Agency has committed to strengthening operations procedures and improving emergency communications processes. An Executive Oversight Team has been established by Sound Transit and King County Metro that will begin quarterly reporting and develop an incident action plan.

## **Discussion**

Employee, Consultant and Operator Availability - COP members noted the challenges transit operators face to provide safe, clean service to paying riders without being inhumane to those who use the system for shelter or create dangerous conditions on vehicles. The COP has identified this complex issue as a focus area for 2022.

November 26, 2021, Link Incident – COP members appreciated the detailed report and recommendations.

The summaries of the February 2, 2022, virtual COP meeting and the February 16, 2022, virtual COP retreat were approved.

## **Member Reports**

Larry Sauv  reported that two proposals had been received in response to the COP administrator recruitment process. A Board workshop on fare enforcement is scheduled for March 16, 2022, from 3:00 to 5:00 PM.

## **Outstanding Questions**

Puget Sound Regional Council response to Kemper Freeman transportation study.

**Next Virtual Meeting:** Wednesday, March 16, 2022, 8:30 – 11:00 AM

- Operations Performance and Peer Comparisons

- Portfolio Services Office Quarterly Update