

Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

October 8, 2025

COP Members Present: Linda Dorris, Scott Lampe, Charlotte Murry, Tom Norcott, James Peyton, Trevor Reed, Paul Thompson

COP Members Absent: Lorenzo Frazier, Mark Lewington, Zak Osborne, Tina Pierce, Donia Zaheri

Others Present: Adam Montee, Katie Flores

2024 Passenger Experience Survey Results

- Emily Yasukochi – Director, System and Service Planning

Staff advised that the Service Plan would be broken into two parts. The first would incorporate Link and Sounder service changes. These changes are considered minor and therefore will not require Board action to approve them for implementation in spring 2026. The second would implement larger ST Express changes and need further Board action in early 2026. Public Engagement was currently underway.

The planned Link service changes, as mentioned, are minor and will not require Board action. The only proposed change is to open Pinehurst Station in north Seattle (opening date to be determined). Pinehurst will be served by the 1 and 2 Lines with service every 4 minutes during peak periods and every 5-8 minutes at other times.

Sounder Service changes similarly will not require Board approval. N Line changes contain slight schedule changes, including the first northbound trip from Seattle departing 20 minutes earlier. S Line changes include extending the first Southbound trip to Lakewood, instead of ending in Tacoma, and providing a northbound trip departing from Lakewood at 3:52pm. These changes will go into effect on March 30, 2026.

The second part of the proposed service plan, regarding ST Express service, is responsive to new Link openings, available operating resources, and passenger needs gathered from public input and evaluation of route performance. Certain routes will be discontinued in light rail corridors that don't offer substantial travel time benefits over Link. Some routes will retain their service in areas where Link operates but does not offer substantial travel time benefits. Finally overnight service along light rail corridors would be added for the first time. Staff would discuss the details of general corridor level changes in the following slides.

In the northern part of the district, Route 513 would add bi-directional service and discontinue service to the Eastmont Park and Ride. Route 515 would be discontinued, as it was a temporary route added in 2024 to supplement the lack of frequency intended by 2 line service. Route 522 currently terminates at Roosevelt Station, but would now terminate at the South Shoreline/148th St. Station to simulate the future Stride Bus Rapid Transit S3 route. King County Metro plans to operate service in the areas no longer served by Route 522. Route 535 also operates along a future Stride BRT route (S2), and frequency would be increased on Saturday and Sunday service to every 30 minutes. Finally, Routes 510, 512, and 532 would not change.

Looking eastward, Routes 550 and 554 would be discontinued, as the 2 Line Crosslake Connection will serve the same corridors with improved frequency and travel times. Route 556 would be shortened from terminating in Seattle's U-District to the Bellevue Transit Center. The route would see increased

frequency to all-day service and also serve additional stops in Issaquah. Routes 542, 545, 560, and 566 would all remain unchanged.

In the Southern corridor, Route 574 would be shortened from the Sea Tac Airport to the Downtown Federal Way Station during Link operational hours. The route would continue to the airport in the period when the route is operating but Link is not. The route frequency would also increase to every 15 minutes for most of the day. Route 580 would be discontinued because Pierce Transit offers service in the same corridor. Route 586 would be discontinued; riders could take the 590 series of routes from Tacoma or 577/578 from Federal Way into Downtown Seattle and transfer to the Link to get to the University of Washington. Routes 577, 578, 590, 592, 594, 595, and 596 would all remain unchanged.

Staff were also proposing overnight ST Express service along Link lines to serve riders and destinations with continuous or non-traditional need like hospitals and the airport. Combined with King County Metro's late night network, 85 percent of Link stations would be accessible 24/7. The three proposed routes are Everett to Seattle, Redmond to Seattle via Bellevue, and Lakewood to Seattle via Sea-Tac Airport. Service would operate from approximately 12:00am to 5:00am and would be evaluated for service adjustments as needed. The service levels are currently in development, but somewhere between 15 and 60 minutes would likely be instituted.

A Title VI equity analysis is required before the adoption of any major service changes to ensure they do not result in disparate impacts for minority communities or represent any disproportionate burden on low-income populations. Staff completed a preliminary analysis on both individual route proposals and systemwide. There are no findings on the systemwide proposal. However, the discontinuation of several ST Express routes were identified to have disparate impacts and/or disproportionate burdens. Staff believe that any harms identified in the analysis would be mitigated by the new Link service, which will provide improved service frequency and capacity.

Engagement on the proposed Service Plan began in the spring of 2025 with an online survey, which was used to gather feedback on how riders thought they would use the 1 and 2 Line extensions after they open and their priorities around service. More than 2,300 responses were collected and nearly 1,000 individual comments were provided. Many comments noted that bus truncations would cause additional time and inconvenience. Approximately 1/3 of comments received raised concerns about losing their bus route and that Link would help, but not mitigate the inconvenience. This engagement informed many of the proposals, including retention of several ST Express routes.

Now that the proposed plan has been released to the public, a survey is open from October 6 to November 7 (updated to November 11 after the date of this meeting). Community open houses in each corridor are planned, as well as outreach at fairs, festivals, and transit events throughout the region. Staff ambassadors were at key stops affected by the proposal during the survey period. Staff have partnered with community-based organizations for much of the outreach events, and a multi-media campaign translated materials into Spanish, simplified and traditional Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Russian, and Korean.

Following the feedback period, the Board will be presented with part 2 of the Service Plan no later than March 2026 so that changes can be implemented in the fall of 2026. Staff advised that the service planning team was also working closely with the Enterprise Initiative. Included in that work will be revisions to Link service assumptions based on current travel patterns and the modified system expansion program to come, an update to the agency's service standards and performance measures, and a multi-year plan covering service on all of the agency's modes.

A member asked if staff conducted any ridership projections for the ST Express overnight service. Staff advised that while they did not conduct ridership projections, the call for them over the years has been

steady and increasing to the point that they believe the demand is present. If implemented, service will be monitored closely and service levels could be adjusted if needed.

A member asked what the changes in platform hours would be with the plan. Staff advised that service hours would reduce slightly, but not significantly. More work would be conducted during the Enterprise Initiative to better understand the hours needed over the long term. The member noted that previous service plans were hampered by staffing challenges. Staff agreed that it had been a challenge, and all of these plans are subject to operational capacity at partner agencies.

A member asked what the time comparisons for Route 586 (Tacoma to U-District) was, considering the route would be discontinued. Staff advised the bus-to-rail trip would save between 7 to 20 minutes on the trip, depending on time of day traveling. In addition, the connection is available all day, 7 days/week rather than the current AM/PM weekday peak trips only. The member asked why respondents to the early 2025 survey were increasingly using it for leisure instead of commuting. He asked if it was a changing demographic or if it was a continuing impact of the pandemic. Staff believed that it was both changing behaviors, and the system evolving.

A member noticed that there was some crossover on ST Express routes. They asked if discontinuing a certain route would have serious impacts on the other routes still serving those stops. Staff advised that if a route was removed in an area, they would ensure that those stops were still served either by ST Express or partner agencies, depending on where they operate.

Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary

A member suggested one correction. There was a motion to adopt the August notes, seconded, and approved. Charlotte Murry abstained.

ST Express and Sounder National Transit Database

- Raj Cheriell – Director, Enterprise Data and Analytics
- Anusha Bhat – Business Analyst, Business Intelligence
- Melody Smith – Manager, Enterprise Reporting

Staff reminded the panel that the ST Express, Sounder, and Tacoma Link data it was reviewing in the presentation was from 2023, due to the lag in the process of gathering and then re-distributing such large quantities of data. 2024 data would be available in the following couple of months, at which point staff will update its source information.

Staff recounted that in 1974, Congress required the Federal Transit Administration to set up an official repository of a common set of statistics from every transit agency in the country. This repository, known as the National Transit Database (NTD), was designed to incorporate a wide variety of data. The data collected includes information on agencies' finances, the services they are operating and the assets they use to operate these services. The submittal program the FTA provides is comprised of modules, each of which contain a number of specific forms which transit agencies need to complete. This data is collected annually. These statistics allow regional planning agencies, like the Puget Sound Regional Council and local agencies, like Sound Transit, to perform multi-year comparisons, complete trends analyses and compare their performance with other transit agencies across the country. The information included on

the forms is then used to allocate money back to submitters on the basis of the information provided about what happened the previous year.

Sound Transit receives about \$74 million annually through Federal Funding Formula programs based on NTD data. Formula funds account for a significant part of the agency's long-range funding plan -- about \$2.7 billion dollars during the duration of the 30-years that plan covers. This type of Federal funding also amounts to about one-fifth of all of the grant funding included in that financial plan. These funds alone cover over 1/7th of Sound Transit's annual operating budget.

Staff then reviewed the [comparison tool which was built by Sound Transit's business intelligence team, and which is available on the Sound Transit website.](#)

Staff began reviewing ST Express comparison data. The peer agencies chosen were King County Metro, Pierce Transit, and Community Transit as they are key regional partners operating within the Puget Sound area. Portland TriMet was selected due to its location on the West Coast and its comparable annual passenger miles. Cincinnati and Hampton Roads Transit were chosen for their alignment in total revenue miles. Finally, St. Louis Metro and New Orleans RTA were included due to their similarity in annual passenger boardings.

The trip length metric was included to highlight one of the big differences between Sound Transit and many of the selected peers: the average length of the trip taken by passengers. This metric is calculated by looking at total passenger miles traveled over the number of boardings. Boardings increased by 25 percent (from 6.9 million to 8.6 million). However, passenger miles per boarding for Sound Transit has remained consistent and the highest of the peers, suggesting longer average trip distances, and highlighting Sound Transit's role in regional express bus service.

The service efficiency metric is determined by showing how many riders each service hour generates. Staff noted that Sound Transit ranks mid-tier in boardings per revenue hour compared to peer agencies. This is notable given the long freeway heavy routes of ST Express where passenger turnover is less frequent than other frequent stop routes. All agency peers show a dip in 2020 highlighting impact of covid on commuter services, however Sound Transit shows one of the steepest dips which highlights the reliance on commuter trips heavily impacted by working remotely. This trend is, to a lesser extent, seen in peer agencies as well, suggesting a behavioral shift with more work from home hours and reduced peak hour travel.

The next comparison displayed the cost effectiveness of ST Express service compared to peers by looking at how much it costs the agency to run each service mile. While Sound Transit remains in the middle of the cohort in question in this metric, the agency has avoided some of the more recent steep cost increases that have befallen agencies like King County Metro, TriMet and Community Transit. This cost per revenue miles trend is another indicator of ST Express's role as a regional express bus service which provides higher revenue miles by operating over longer distances.

The final metric reviewed was the fare revenue compared to operating expenses. This is a fairly classic key performance indicator that one might see from any company providing a service. It is essentially the monetary return on investment. Sound Transit consistently generates more fare revenue per dollar of operating expense than most peer agencies including Portland TriMet and the New Orleans Regional transit provider. The agency continues to recover a significant portion of its operating costs through fare revenues. Sound Transit is the only agency among its peers to show a growth in this ratio from 2022 to 2023.

Staff moved on to review Sounder comparison data, with what the FTA defines as Commuter Rail. In looking at other agencies that provide this Commuter Rail service, staff selected Maryland, Northern Indiana, and Virginia as peer agencies due to their similar levels of ridership. Utah Transit Authority and South Florida's Tri-Rail were included based on service footprints similar in length to Sound Transit's.

Two metrics for comparison were provided, service efficiency and cost effectiveness. Comparing boardings per revenue hour, a key indicator of this operational efficiency, Sound Transit is leading the pack among the peer commuter rail agencies like Maryland MTA and Utah TA. Despite the setbacks during pandemic, the Sounder system has not only been recovering but recovering rapidly reflecting a strategic approach to weathering the impacts of the pandemic; strong and returning ridership demand; and effective service delivery. Staff also reviewed Sounder's cost efficiency by looking at total operating expenses per boarding. Sounder maintains a middle of the pack cost per boarding making it more cost effective than Maryland MTA and Virginia rail, especially post pandemic, indicating a faster return of ridership and better cost control.

Staff shared one metric for Tacoma Link, trip length. Sound Transit has emerged at the top of its peers for street rail service which is likely a reflection of the Hilltop Extension. Peers like The Hop in Milwaukee and the Portland streetcar continue to see average trip lengths of about one mile reflecting their short downtown routes. T-Line now delivers the highest passenger miles per boarding, indicating it is offering more meaningful trips for riders; trips that cover distances longer than people would typically be willing to walk on a regular basis.

A member asked if they were able to drill down deeper than just gross numbers. Staff advised that NTD currently only asks for modal data, so they are not able to do so. They asked what sort of changes the agency has made based on data presented. Staff noted that while they review the data annually, they would need to check in with the service delivery department and bring back any relevant examples.

A member asked if the agency needs to pay to be a part of the National Transit Database. Staff advised that all transit agencies which receive federal funding are required to submit this data to the Federal Transit Administration, which then makes the data publicly available.

A member asked when new data would be available. November is when next year's data is released.

A member asked if the NTD weighted certain metrics such that it affected funding levels. Staff advised that the formula to provide funds was complicated and provided the general formula. The region also receives funding based on population served and fixed guideway miles provided. Bus is HOV lanes, which is shared by cars and would not apply, but Link, Sounder and T line would fully fall within the fixed guideway category. Service being offered more than seven years old also garners funds. All the statistics for agencies in the region are aggregated into a large pot of funding for the region. 70% of that funding can be doled out by using the formula referred to earlier. 30% of that is based on service and population.

Another member asked if all of that funding was based on older data. Staff advised that was correct.

Audit Division Review

- Patrick Johnson – Audit Director

Staff highlighted two external audit activities which occurred since the panel was last briefed in August. The Pacific Northwest Regional Office of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) finished

its review of the agency's preparedness grant awards program, which had no findings. Additionally, the Washington State Auditor's Office, or SAO, will begin its annual accountability audit of Sound Transit shortly, with the entrance meeting scheduled for the following day, which would be communicated at the Finance & Audit Committee meeting. the State Auditor performs annual accountability audits of local governments—including Sound Transit—to review financial activity from the previous year. This includes checking expenditures, revenues, contracts, and reporting practices to ensure strong internal controls and proper use of public resources. That work is anticipated to be completed during the 4th quarter of 2025.

Staff reviewed the 2025 comprehensive audit plan dashboard, which is available on the agency's website. Integrating the data internally with this dashboard helps improve reporting and general transparency for the public. At the time of the meeting, 21 of 35 total audits were completed with 13 still in progress and 1 not yet started. Many of the 13 in-progress audits should be completed by the November 20 Finance and Audit Committee meeting. In 2025, Internal Audit work identified eight findings. These are actively monitored throughout the year and are visible on the Audit Plans dashboard, which may be access anytime via the link at the bottom of the slide 4 of the presentation, or by searching 'audit plan dashboard' on SoundTransit.org. Looking ahead, staff plans to expand dashboard capabilities to include deeper trend analysis, risk categorization, and improved action plan tracking—further supporting data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement.

Staff turned the panel's attention to the 2025 Disaster Preparedness Performance Audit, which was recommended by the panel at the end of 2024 and approved by the Finance & Audit Committee in May. Staff recommended that the audit be postponed to 2026. The reason is simple: key documentation and criteria needed to conduct a thorough, assurance-level review won't be available until early 2026. Staff already briefed the CEO and the Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee about this change, and they are both aware of the revised timeline.

Staff clarified that the agency is not sitting idle in this space: there are many important improvements are already underway. The agency is developing a comprehensive Agency Continuity Plan that will integrate program-specific plans, such as the Continuity of Operations Plan, or COOP, into a single agency-wide framework, with final documents expected by year-end. Staff are also updating the Incident Response Plan, including enhancements to the Everbridge mass notification system, and progress is underway to fully staff the Emergency Operations Center, or EOC, and bring management of it in-house. The agency is in the process of filling key vacancies—with three out of four positions filled, and one remaining vacancy's recruitment is still in progress. Additionally, a compliance audit of Public Safety & Emergency Management is currently underway. While it covers a wider range of operational and regulatory areas, this review will deliver valuable insights that directly support day-to-day emergency management and disaster recovery efforts. It will also help pinpoint opportunities to improve preparedness and coordination ahead of the focused disaster recovery audit work planned for next year when this topic is ready for us to audit.

A member noted that any findings from the delayed performance audit would likely not give the agency much time to make corrections before the World Cup. Staff acknowledged that it was a tight turnaround, but staff from Deputy CEO Moises Gutierrez all the way down were committed to ensuring that the agency was in good shape.

A member asked for more information about bringing the Emergency Operations Center in-house. Staff advised that there was a mix between agency staff and King County Metro staff. The change would bring the EOC fully into Sound Transit.

Before reviewing the topics available to select for recommendation in 2025, staff reviewed the past five years of audit recommendations. Staff praised the panel for its commitment to selecting performance audit topics that reflect both public priorities and organizational risk. Next, four topics were provided for consideration for the 2026 performance audit. Internal audit topics are developed based on a range of factors including alignment with the agency's Enterprise Risk Management function, regulatory requirements, past audit findings, and emerging operational risks. Each topic has been selected with a focus on where Internal Audit can add the most value—ensuring compliance with federal requirements, strengthening governance, aligning people and resources with agency goals, and reducing risks.

The first topic is the IIA (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) review, formerly known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law or BIL. The IIA provides billions of dollars in federal funding to help build and improve transportation systems. To keep receiving this money and protect the agency's reputation, Sound Transit must follow strict rules and report things correctly. This review would help ensure Sound Transit has strong systems in place to avoid mistakes, prevent delays, and keep the agency eligible for future funding. It also supports smoother day-to-day operations and better planning for big projects.

The second topic is an internal governance maturity review. Internal Audit will assess how agency decisions are managed by reviewing governance documents such as internal policies and procedures, change review committees, and delegation of authority processes. We'll identify areas that need improvement and offer recommendations to strengthen oversight, clarify responsibilities, and support long-term organizational growth. This review ensures the agency's controls are effective, compliant, and aligned with best practices—helping ensure the agency operates more smoothly and responsibly.

The third topic is a workforce planning & budget process review. Internal Audit will look at how the agency plans for hiring and spending to make sure they work together. We'll check if staffing needs match the budget and if there's a clear plan to stay affordable and grow over time. This review would help make sure the agency has strong systems in place so teams are properly staffed, budgets are used wisely, and long-term goals can be met without waste or delays.

The last topic is a regulatory permitting review. Internal Audit will check how well the agency is following permit rules from different cities and government agencies. This includes making sure all the right paperwork is done for new projects, upgrades, and improvements. This review helps the agency avoid delays, stay within budget, and follow the law—so projects can move forward smoothly and safely.

A member asked if the workforce planning budget process review would cover just Sound Transit employees or those who would operate the system from partner agencies. Staff advised that they would look at the larger picture, so not just agency staff but all who would need to operate the system.

A member noted that the regulatory permitting review would rely much on the practices of the municipalities. They asked what the agency could audit that would give value, considering that fact. Staff advised that there were potential areas in which the agency could be permitting more in some jurisdictions than in others, or that controls were not being applied evenly across the whole capital program. The member asked what of the four topics would have the most benefit. Staff advised that the governance maturity would have the deepest look into how the agency is run. The third would be more focused on financial and operational performance. The regulatory audit would be more on the capital side. Staff advised that from a financial perspective, the IIA audit would have the most impact. But if looking at them in an operational perspective, the priorities would be flipped.

A member asked what staff would recommend as the best audit. Staff advised that their ranking would be governance maturity review, regulatory permitting review, IJJA (but the FTA Triannual is coming due soon), then workforce planning. The member agreed with that ranking as well.

A member asked what the governance maturity review would offer that is different from the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) recommendations. Staff advised that the TAG was looking at the agency more from higher level perspective, with focus on actions the Board could direct or take itself, while this would be more internal. The agency's reorganization could be a part of that audit. Another member asked if the audit would judge the agency's policy alignment with the reorganization. Staff said that it would.

A member asked which would be the most impacted by continuous changes in the agency. The workforce planning budget process review would be.

Discussion on the preferred Annual Performance Audit topic

A member noted that the federal funding was so much in flux, that they would prefer the governance topic over the IJJA audit.

Another member agreed, noting that duplicating work that may be needed for the FTA's Triannual wouldn't be ideal.

A member noted that the permitting audit could be a high-risk topic, and the audit could expose those and allow the agency to mitigate them. They also found great value in the governance audit.

A member noted that many changes could be expected with the Enterprise Initiative, so ensuring good internal governance would be valuable.

Staff noted that they would take the preferences of the members present and provide them to the full panel, along with a survey to get the preference of the larger group.

Member Reports

A member asked for a link to the 2026 service plan survey. Staff would distribute that to the full panel.

A member noted that they took the Link to the airport and had a good ride. They also advised that an outreach meeting was taking place in Everett for the Everett Link Extension.

A member noted that agency staff joined a jobs outreach effort for youth, and they were happy to have them join and promote the many different opportunities the agency can offer.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, November 12, 2025, 5:30 – 8:15 PM

- Sustainability Plan
- Long Range Financial Plan
- 2026 Proposed Budget