

Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

March 8, 2023

COP Members Present: James Peyton, Larry Sauvé, Joe Scorcio, Paul Thompson, Carston Curd, Diana Cambronero Venegas, Scott Lampe, Tracy Oster, Charlotte Murry, Lucas Simons, Tom Norcott, Helen Powell, Tina Pierce, Lorenzo Frazier

COP Members Absent: Gabriel Clark

Others Present: Kathy Albert, Katie Flores, Adam Montee, Chris Hoffman

System Expansion Overview

- Chelsea Leavy, Acting Deputy Executive Director

Sound Transit staff began with an introduction and overview of the system expansion program. Staff spoke about Sound Transit's three successful ballot measures. These fund the work of capital development. Staff reviewed the services they currently provide, including Link Light Rail, Sounder trains, and ST Express Buses. Staff then reviewed the current expansion program, including light rail and Bus Rapid Transit. Staff then provided a summary of the major light rail projects in development. There are three phases of planning and development in the environmental review process for each of these projects: alternatives analysis, Draft Environmental Impacts Statement (EIS), and Final EIS. Once the Final EIS is complete, Sound Transit receives a Record of Decision (ROD) from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). A COP member asked if the alignment ever changes and if they have to redo an EIS. Staff said that occasionally a Supplemental EIS is prepared if all risks are not adequately documented in the original EIS.

Everett Link Extension

- Eric Widstrand, Director of High Capacity Transit Corridor Development

Staff began by introducing some basic information about Everett Link: that it will be 16 miles in length, have six stations (with an additional unfunded station possible), two parking facilities, and that the target open date is 2037 (under the affordable schedule the opening date could slip to 2041). An Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF) is also part of the project, and it will require approximately 66 acres to store and maintain 150 light rail vehicles; it is expected to open in 2034. Staff have not identified cost risks to date but the project has experienced 7 months' delay during scoping. The project team is currently completing the alternatives development phase and expects to complete environmental review in 2026. A Community Advisory Group (CAG) and a leadership group have provided guidance on the alignment and station locations. The Sound Transit Board is scheduled to identify a preferred alternative in June 2023. The EIS scoping period was open from January 23 to March 10 and included an online open house, 3 public meetings and 7 drop-in information sessions. Over 1,600 people attended the in-person house on February 15.

Staff said they evaluated alignments and stations against criteria within several categories. Staff then reviewed project sections, describing the different station and alignment alternatives and providing an overview of how each of those alternatives performed against the criteria. Staff then talked about cost estimates at the concept level, which is 1-2% design for alignment and stations and for the OMF. Preliminary cost estimates for the alignment and stations are all within the original cost estimates and range from \$4.85 billion to \$6.65 billion. For the OMF, that range is from \$1.4 billion to \$2.05 billion.

Tacoma Dome Link Extension

- Curvie Hawkins, Project Director, High Capacity Transit Development

Sound Transit staff began with an update on the project, which includes an action item to the Board regarding issues in Fife and Federal Way that impact the project. Staff have started community engagement on these two issues. Staff talked about cost and schedule risks; cost risks are not currently a factor, but delays have affected the schedule. The project includes 10 miles of new alignment, 4 stations and one river crossing. It will continue where the Federal Way Extension ends and extend to the Tacoma Dome. On the South Federal Way Segment there is a single preferred alternative and additional alternatives being studied. There are also two station locations with a preferred alternative at Enchanted Parkway Station. They are currently studying an additional alignment alternative along SR 99 to avoid cultural resources along I-5. Staff are asking the Board to add this alternative to the EIS and remove the current I-5 alternative from preferred status. This would allow the Board to identify a preferred alternative after the study. The station locations would also change in this segment as a result of this study and would be evaluated equally in the EIS. All stations would have parking associated with them. The Fife alternative includes a single preferred station location, in the future Fife City Center area. However, this station is in a floodplain. Staff are proposing additional locations for the station outside of the floodplain but as close to Fife City Center as possible. In Tacoma there are no proposed changes to station locations. They anticipate a major river crossing over the Puyallup River with a light rail only bridge. The Portland Avenue station has a preferred option and a design option. The Tacoma Dome station has 4 options, with a preferred option at 25th Street West.

Staff then talked about the community engagement process on the new station options in Fife and the new alignment option in Federal Way. There is currently an online open house underway, as well as in-person drop-in sessions. With the new options being considered there is a delay in DEIS publication to mid-2024. There will also be a service delay until 2035. Next steps include finishing the public engagement process, going to the Board for action, and publishing the DEIS in mid-2024.

Staff then shifted to talking about the OMF, which will support 144 trains and provide about 470 living wage jobs. It is planned to be in service in 2029. There are currently three alternative sites for the facility. The preferred alternative is South 336th Street in Federal Way. The site is over 60 acres and is near a mega church. It will require replacing a street that will provide an extension to 18th Place South. The OMF will require a one mile connecting track and a testing track. Staff said that there is local funding and a required federal approval due to the need to use WSDOT right of way. They are in the process of determining a federal partner and this has resulted in a delay in the project schedule.

West Seattle and Ballard Link Extension

- Sandra Phan, High Capacity Transit Director

Sound Transit staff started with a review of the timeline for West Seattle and Ballard. They are both currently in the planning phase, which will extend through 2023. West Seattle opening is scheduled for 2032 and for Ballard it is 2037-2039. These dates could change depending on Board actions. The Draft EIS was published in early 2022, which received over 5,000 comments. Based on comments, the Board modified the alignment and directed staff to conduct further studies on the Ballard segment. The West Seattle segment hasn't reached the final EIS stage yet. The West Seattle Link has four stations and the Ballard Link has 10. Motion M2022-57 identified a preferred alternative for West Seattle but not for

Ballard. The board is currently scheduled to identify a preferred alternative for Ballard on March 23, 2023. There are a number of areas along the entire alignment that are being studied further. The presentation then shifted to a review of the further studies for both extensions. In the Chinatown International District (CID) there are alternatives being studied on 4th and 5th Avenues with shallow and deep tunnels. Staff have held an extensive community engagement process over the last 6 months to explore ideas related to the further studies in the CID. This included refinements to the 4th Avenue shallow tunnel that are reducing residential displacements, impacts to BNSF, and impacts to traffic. The cost increase as a result of these potential changes adds up to about \$700 million. At the station north of the CID, it would be consolidated with the midtown station due to its close proximity to the CID station. Transfers from the 2 line to 1 line would take a little longer than with the North CID station. This concept would reduce costs by \$360 million. At the station south of the CID, it does not accommodate direct transfers and would result in the temporary closure of 6th Avenue. Another community idea is to have both a North of CID and South of CID station. This would add \$160 million in cost. There were also discussions about activating and reimagining the Union Station Plaza.

Further studies downtown include station entrance refinements, reducing station depths, and consolidating station entrances. There are also some potential alignment changes. These include the South Lake Union (SLU) mix and match alternative. This results in \$200 million in increased costs, some of which are attributed to relocating a long-haul fiber line. There is also a Seattle Center Mix and match concept. This avoids some impacts to Seattle Center but will cause some impacts to other neighbors. The cost increase with this option is about \$210 million. Another study looks at shifting the alignment away from Seattle Center's Northwest rooms. Increased costs for this add up to about \$60 million.

In the South Interbay area Sound Transit is looking to address impacts of the guideway on area properties. They are also studying shifting the Interbay Station, which could reduce costs by \$30 million. Shifting the portal location at Smith Cove is not feasible and shifting two stations to one station reduces access but also adds about \$210 million in costs. In Ballard, Sound Transit is studying a tunnel versus a bridge and considering options for refining stations along the alignment, many of which add significant costs.

All of the additional studies and review have added a year to environmental review schedule. There are also costs and schedule risks associated with design and construction phases. With all changes accounted for the additional costs in the Ballard segment add up to \$150 million. For West Seattle, a number of changes resulted in a cost increase of \$130 million. Combined with the \$150 million increase on the Ballard Link, total cost increases add up to \$280 million. Sound Transit believes that there is up to \$400 million in potential funding through a variety of sources.

Discussion

Everett Link Extension – A COP member asked about the cost estimates and if Sound Transit looks back at previous projects to determine how accurate they will be. Sound Transit said they do use past estimates for comparison efforts. They said that there is a lot of contingency that goes into costs and cost estimates get refined as they move forward. Construction costs are impacted by a number of factors, and they try to learn from past projects. Costs also rise due to jurisdictional requests and mitigation efforts. Estimates are also based on industry standards and Sound Transit follows their guidelines and estimates for variation. Another member commented that the public outreach has been very thorough on the project. Another member asked about the tribal scoping meeting. Staff said the agency scoping meeting was inclusive of tribes. A member asked about opening dates for the line. Staff said they currently have a \$500 million funding gap that could cause them to open the project in two phases. That member also asked about providing bus service to the Mukilteo Ferry. Staff said they are looking to provide space for buses at the northern most station. Another member asked about deviation in alignment from the approved measure in

ST3. Staff acknowledged the alignment to Boeing is different than what was voted on but noted that there is very real potential for large ridership at that station. Going straight up I-5 also would leave out the Casino Road neighborhood.

Tacoma Dome Link Extension – A COP member asked about the potential alignment in Federal Way and if it will be at grade. Staff said that it will be mostly elevated to avoid street crossings. Another member asked about the Fife Station and flood risks. Staff said that the station and track are elevated, but significant flooding could affect access to the station. Staff is also aware of potential climate change affects. A member asked about the Puyallup River crossing and the tribe’s concerns about including a structure in the water. Staff said the tribe has shown a willingness to see the studies and know that there will be mitigation involved. Another member asked about the cultural resources that are affecting the Federal Way alignment. Staff said there is a former boarding school in the area. A member asked about the concern about delay in schedule being voiced in the community. Staff indicated that Sound Transit will be taking measures with alternative modes, including Sounder, that could mitigate these concerns. Staff said they are also going to increase ST Express bus service, but they are experiencing an extreme operator shortage.

West Seattle and Ballard Link Extension – A COP member asked about the \$400 million in potential funding and when that might be agreed upon. Staff said that the intent for third parties to provide funding would be identified before the design phase, in some type of binding agreement.

Discussion, Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary, Member Reports

The meeting summary for the February 8 meeting was approved. A COP member said the last presentation felt rushed and had a lot of information; it may require a revisit since this is such an important topic. Another member participating virtually indicated the sound quality was a challenge, and it was difficult to hear the presentations. Another member suggested allotting less time for presentations and more time for questions. Another member echoed that that the panel needs more time for discussion. James suggested putting this as an item for the retreat. James asked if the panel wanted more time to review the 2022 Annual Report and approve it at the retreat or if they were ready to approve it this evening. Tom made a motion to adopt the report and it was seconded. Joe suggested that there is a misleading clause about the Audit Topic Recommendation Letter and said that there should be clarification that although the letter was prepared in 2022 that it is a 2023 letter. The 2022 Annual Report was approved by the COP with noted minor corrections regarding the Audit Topic Recommendation Letter. At the conclusion of the meeting, the panel recognized the service of Larry Sauve, who was attending his last COP meeting. Larry has served on the panel (and was its vice chair and chair) throughout the pandemic and has provided strong leadership guidance. Several COP members thanked Larry for his service and noted that he will be missed.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, April 12, 2023, 5:30 – 8:15 PM

- Transit Oriented Development Program Overview
- Sound Transit Public Art Program