

Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

May 14, 2025

COP Members Present: Tina Pierce, Paul Thompson, Scott Lampe, Mark Lewington, James Peyton, Linda Dorris, Tom Norcott, Diana Cambronero Venegas, Donia Zaheri, Lucas Simons, Trevor Reed

COP Members Absent: Zak Osborne, Lorenzo Frazier, Charlotte Murry,

Others Present: Adam Montee, Katie Flores, and Nancy Thai

National Transit Database Data Review

- Raj Cheriell – Director-Essential Data & Analytics
- Angela Greene – Deputy Director-Business Intelligence Program
- Anusha Bhat – Business Analyst-Business Intelligence

Staff presented a review of Sound Transit’s Link Light Rail compared to peers in the National Transit Database (NTD). Staff shared the tool that can be found on Sound Transit’s website under [Peer comparisons](#) and is available to the public. This presentation mainly focused on ST 2 over past few years. Every transit agency that receives funding is required to submit data to the NTD. Sound Transit received \$75 million annually. The data in the presentation is through 2023. When using the tool, start by choosing the mode (e.g. Light Rail, commuter bus, etc.) you are interested in, select peers you want to compare next, then finally you can move through different indicators (e.g. annual boardings, annual revenue miles, etc.).

Staff selected these peers for comparison for this presentations due to their similarity to Sound Transit’s service: Boston MBTA, DART (Dallas), Denver RTD (serves a similar population), LA Metro (serves the west coast), MN Metro Transit, Portland TriMet (serves the west coast), San Diego MTS (serves the west coast), SF MUNI (serves the west coast), St Louis Metro

Sound Transit had one of the strongest ridership rebounds after the pandemic, rising nearly 14% from 2022 to 2023. Staff attributed much of this to system expansion. Sound Transit passengers tend to travel farther per trip (about 7 miles) than compared to nearly all peers. This demonstrates the system supports longer regional trips and shorter trips.

In 2023, the cost per passenger (i.e., total operating expense per boarding) rose slightly to \$8.82. The agency still operates more cost efficiently compared to other high-expense markets like Los Angeles and San Francisco. Sound Transit had the highest labor hours associated with capital facilities investment through ST2 when compared to peers. The agency also has the highest percentage of total operating expenses go to facilities maintenance. This is attributed to added maintenance demands of newer stations built during ST2 and a commitment to maintenance. The system’s vertical transportation shows strong investment in vertical accessibility with over two times the average number of peer elevators. The system has lower station density to prioritize faster travel times over long distances with a desire to improve regional speed while ensuring convenient access to the system. The agency has invested in vehicles to meet demand and provide higher quality service and supported fleet expansion tied to ST2.

One member commented that Sound Transit is high compared to peers in average hour per number of passengers, long trip length, highest cost per revenue mile, but also lowest cost per passenger mile.

A member asked if staff knew what happened to cause a major reduction in trip length in 2021 for San Francisco MUNI. It was likely related to immense ridership reduction after the pandemic.

Another member asked to clarify if this tool was just for Light Rail. This presentation is focused on Link, but the tool includes the other modes included in the NTD. Staff can return to the COP regarding Bus Rapid Transit data when the service begins. The [system performance tracker](#) does compare the different Sound Transit modes. The member continued and ask how the data is being gathering for Light Rail and BRT in the future, for example through tracking Orca cards. When staff look at ridership, there are automated passenger counters on vehicles. There are two sensors on Light Rail cars to track onboarding and offboarding. About 80% of the fleet is equipped with these sensors, and staff use federally approved methodology to make up the other 20% that do not have the sensors, APC – automatic passenger counters, to within 5% accuracy.

A member asked about data for Pierce and Snohomish Counties since this data was focused on Seattle for the Link. Yes, staff are conducting comparisons in those counties looking at Sounder and T Line. Staff would be glad to return to COP to give a presentation on these other modes. Staff are working on a beta tool to show a geospatial view to provide a larger corridor view (Angela can share a link or screenshot with COP members).

A member asked which peer is closest to Sound Transit in terms of newness. Sound Transit is highest in capital labor commitment, showing the investments in capital projects over the past few years as extensions are opened. It is a reflection of investment in future expansion, and also includes investments in maintenance. Older transit systems have more investment in maintenance rather than expansion.

Another member commented on the agency's investments in facilities maintenance and vertical conveyance. Sound Transit has so many more elevators and escalators than other peers and the cost to maintain them is greater. Yes, other agencies might be focusing on maintenance on vehicles rather than facilities. Sound Transit is very focused on facilities right now, especially since they are new. The member asked if the data includes contractor hours and staff hours. Yes, it does.

A member remarked that the presentation focused on ST2 data, which is old, and wondered what the lag is on including ST3 data. The 2024 data will be available in November (when new data is typically available); this is the most current data available from NTD.

One member shared appreciation that this data and tool are available to the public to support transparency.

A member commented that deferred maintenance can be a liability and asked what staff are doing to track asset liability over time. Staff do not have that data currently, but are looking at the total lifecycle of assets compared to annual expenditure. The data staff get from NTD is a snapshot in time, rather than future oriented predictions. Another member added that the COP has had a recurring conversation with staff around assets to get asset conditions into the performance tracker and to conduct analysis on when they need to be renewed. Staff are hoping to be more data-driven in the future.

A member asked if New York and Chicago also report to the NTD. Yes, they are heavy rail and are considered a different mode from light rail, so do not serve as a peer comparison to Sound Transit Link.

Vertical Transportation Update

- John Carini – Deputy Director-Vertical Conveyances

Staff provided an update on vertical transportation (VT) in the Sound Transit system. The vertical transportation mission statement was developed in 2020 and centers on safety and reliability. Projected portfolio (of escalators and elevators) growth is spread out over a 70-mile radius from Lakewood to Everett and is estimated to have 575 assets by 2041. The performance target for 140 elevators is 97% monthly availability, while the target for 109 escalators is 95% monthly availability. The difference in targets comes down to maintenance time, typically elevators take between a half day and 1 day and escalators take 2 full days for annual testing. There is a new target of less than 3% for overall mechanical out of service hours versus total available hours. Staff categorize the cause when assets become inoperable using cc tv or security footage. Outage categories are: misuse, vandalism, power outage, environmental (e.g., lots of leaves blown into combs of escalators or ice melt build up during winter), mechanical failures, or an incident/accident (a state inspector has to come check that is safe for continued use).

There are currently two vendors who maintain vertical transportation. The first is Schindler Elevator and since Mid-American Elevator has been awarded new contracts in the system, the agency is contracting with them as their equipment is implemented. The agency also has dedicated technicians assigned to Sound Transit. Assets are maintained to meet state requirements. Tasks are nested, combining tasks (e.g., during bi-annual tasks, the vendors also perform monthly tasks) for greater efficiency. Staff also keep detailed spare parts inventory stored in warehouse facilities in Lynnwood, Union Station and machine rooms across the portfolio.

VT staff conduct monthly audits of VT assets. They visit every piece of equipment, conduct vendor maintenance audit (maintenance control program – MCP), and host weekly vendor meetings to discuss performance and areas of concern. Staff gather detailed data and perform analysis to identify trends and repeated outages and work with stakeholders to work on mitigation plans for repetitive outages and misuse events

There have been several VT program enhancements. Staff installed live monitoring hardware, which has been very successful. It was rolled out in Q1 of 2024, and all new expansion projects are planned to put in monitoring equipment before live service. Live monitoring provides live data and notification of outages within minutes and also provides this data to stakeholders. Staff have also enhanced dispatch protocols, which have decreased the time equipment is out of service. There is a deep clean contract to visit every piece of equipment to conduct a deep clean, helping bring up the level of equipment cleanliness and decrease debris buildup on critical components. The modernization program is in place and plans to have all modernizations in place at the International District station before the FIFA World Cup begins.

The VT performance data is current from May 12 and shows that VT is exceeding its performance targets. Annual unplanned out of service hours has been decreasing year over year since 2021 (all outage types). Annual mechanical only out of service hours are also decreasing over time and declining year over year.

Staff will continue looking for enhancements and new ways to better maintain assets. They are working on using a predictive maintenance model to be more data-driven based on how equipment is used and tailoring maintenance to the data. Staff are conducting failure rate analysis for equipment, like a door operator and looking at the make and model to see how they perform. Staff are using 3D modeling, which will help provide more context than just seeing data, and using new asset specifications to use the most resilient pieces of equipment.

A member asked if all equipment have a live monitoring box. Yes, all elevators and escalators currently do.

Another member commented that most light rail systems have elevators and asked how Sound Transit uses international data to guide planning. Staff do not because safety guidelines differ in other countries. The US is not allowed to use certain equipment that other countries can.

One member asked about the contractual maintenance agreement versus work outside of that of Mid-American since they have been brought on as a second contractor because of the procurement of their elevators. Staff have worked with new CEO Dow Constantine for a one-year work warranty from the time an elevator is installed, then five years of contracted maintenance. The agency will be able to add in new assets into existing contracts.

Another member shared that in the past, the older elevators and escalators at the University of Washington (UW) station and downtown stations (13 escalators) seemed to have more outages. There was conversation about replacing those with higher quality assets. There were component replacements at UW, but performance improved drastically and then staff decided they no longer needed to be completely replaced and modernized since they were meeting performance targets. The downtown stations are due to be replaced and the agency has secured \$8.7 million in funding from the board for repairs and safety standards and upgrades.

One member shared their appreciation for the improvements since joining the COP in 2022 and being frustrated by the often out of service escalators.

Another member asked about the VT performance of SeaTac since, anecdotally, they seemed to not fare well. Staff can provide a breakdown on outage causes and acknowledged that escalators are troublesome because the specific parts are difficult to get and minimally supported by the manufacturer.

A member asked how Sound Transit will maintain expertise and abilities to work on VT assets on staff in this growth period. They shared that California has a program that loans out staff to keep up their skills and expertise to public agencies. Sound Transit staff host forums with peer agencies, including from Canada, around VT. The forum meets quarterly to share knowledge, specifications, and issues (e.g., glass vandalism or biohazards in elevators). Sound Transit has invested significant resources in VT; other agencies do not have dedicated staff like Sound Transit does.

A member asked how often elevators are sanitized. They are cleaned every day.

Project MOST Report

- Julie Honeywell – Chief People and Culture Officer

Staff presented on project MOST, Mobilizing One Sound Transit. A strong organization culture is important to be able to deliver the program to the region, thus project MOST was launched. Project MOST aims to create a stronger organizational structure and streamline the agency to improve efficiency, increase quality outcomes, and empower employees. Staff went through a four-phase process: functional alignment, working teams (17 teams with employees from different departments and work levels), organizational structure (defining roles, placing people in them, and aligning people into the right fit), and change management and communications (townhalls, workshops, and equipping leaders).

The project refined agency structure into eight departments, each focusing on a key aspect of the agency's work: capital delivery, finance and business administration, people and culture, agency oversight, service delivery, legal, strategy, and civil rights, equity, and inclusion. No staff were eliminated in the process. Some employees (7%) received a new title, and some changed departments or moved within their departments. Project MOST created a foundation to continue growth.

Staff conducted a change readiness and culture survey in December 2024. This survey went out right after organizational changes were announced.

One member commented that there is no change in the average ratings (3.0) for the expertise-based decision-making indicator, even though it was a recommendation from the TAG. Yes, this is a lagging indicator, so staff do not expect to see a change so soon.

Another member asked what the response rate was. 60% of employees responded to the survey.

Staff are working on finalizing and refining the organizational structure. They are helping new teams get set up and each department has a mobilization change lead. The team mobilization maturity model is used to assess progress, optimize performance, and encourage continual improvement. The goal is to help teams become more resilient, aligned, and effective.

Staff describe cultural transformation as mission in motion. The Chief People and Culture Officer is working with staff to understand the agency's current state assessment. Overall, staff at all levels of the agency feel a deep sense of pride and that Sound Transit is making a positive contribution to the region. Staff are working to translate insights into shared cultural expectations. There is a cultural acceleration team to support this work. Culture is everyone's responsibility, and staff will continue to conduct engagement around the Culture Transformation Plan to implement it.

The Executive Leadership Accelerator Program (ELAP) is increasing leadership quality within the agency. This competency model is research-based and includes general competencies for everyone, with specific competencies aligned for specific roles. The roles are individual contributors, people leader, director, executive, and cabinet. There is a 9-month cohort program where each person has an individualized leadership plan and goals. Cohorts participate in a real world cohort project.

A member commented that this restructuring process is typically seen when there is a new CEO that intends to stick around, but this was done with an interim CEO. The member asked how the new CEO will continue this work. This was a part of the new CEO search and has Board buy-in. It was inspired by the TAG recommendations. The new CEO Constantine is committed to the cultural transformation and is invested in this work.

Another member commented that the first two change readiness survey questions around understanding project MOST and communication effectiveness scored pretty low. The member asked how communications be addressed moving forward. The team mobilization work will help with sharing out communications with teams to improve communications. Staff anticipated that the results would be low at this point of the change process and are hopeful scores will improve as the plan progresses.

Another member asked how continuous improvement will be monitored. There is an innovation department and continuous improvement will be a part of that team's work. On a related note, staff shared that the system expansion committee just approved a year contract extension for the TAG, at least on capital projects.

One member asked if there was anything particularly interesting about cultural indicators in the pulse survey when responses were disaggregated. Nothing stood out, but each department is on their own cultural change journey.

Another member asked if staff could provide a breakdown of how many employees are associated with each job description. Yes, staff will have to circle back with that. The member also asked if the agency

uses outside consultants to assist in human resource design and implementation of processes. Yes, they use Eagle Hill currently.

Another member asked how the agency measures or tracks trust and relationship quality with the Board. Interim CEO Sparman spent a lot of time building trust with the Board again. The new CEO Dow Constantine will continue this work as he is transitioning into the CEO role. One of his performance review goals is tied to this (building agency trust and Board relationship). Staff will use surveys to help measure and track this progress.

Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary, Member Reports

Motion to adopt April notes, seconded, and approved.

A member shared that several of the COP members attended the Redmond extension opening and met with previous members.

A member mentioned an article in the [Urbanist](#) about transit-oriented development in Redmond. Another member hoped other jurisdictions could learn from Redmond's experience to leverage investment in transit.

COP members reviewed the topic tracker and may edit it to best serve COP needs.

Physical copies of the resource book are available for COP members and will be updated annually.

A member asked when the new CEO will visit. The new CEO is settling in, but staff are hoping for a visit in the summertime.

Another member shared that Board members Walker and Roscoe are interested in attending a COP meeting and staff are working on scheduling for them to attend. The Board is also interested in staying in the loop about what the COP is doing and interested in. Adam and Katie will report to the Board monthly to share the presentations, approved meeting notes, and notable comments or questions.

A member recommended having updates on West Seattle and Ballard regularly since many concerns are around these two projects. These projects are top of mind for staff, so want to ask staff to come present when there is meaningful information to share. Staff need to share information with the Board first before sharing with the public.

The Financial Plan update is also an important topic. Staff are working on a comprehensive approach to share financial and budgeting information with the COP.

The Board will have a retreat on May 29 at 10:30 a.m. in Bellevue and it is open to the public.

One member went to a Fife City Council and Fife is hoping to give their recommendation for the alignment. They are looking at the I-5 alignment option with at-grade tracks because it is less expensive, but they are only at 10% planning now.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, June 11, 2025, 5:30 – 8:15 PM

- ST Express & Sounder NTD Data Analysis
- TBD