

Sound Transit Citizen Oversight Panel Meeting Summary June 6, 2019

COP Members Present: Fred Auch, Chris Karnes, Sharon Grader, Scott Lampe, Phil Lovell, James Peyton, Bill Roach, Marie Rogers, Dan Santon, Larry Sauvé, Paul Thompson

COP Members Absent: Dan Parker

Others Present: Shelly Brown, Kathy Albert, Jane Emerson, Salina Lyons, Taylor Barros, members of the public

Social Media Program

Bruce Gray, Social Media Supervisor – Communications, provided a briefing on the Agency’s social media program, which provides high-quality content that supports the Communications Department’s goals of building trust and connecting Sound Transit to its customers, stakeholders and the general public.

Sound Transit’s most recent annual on-board rider survey showed that 77 percent of all riders and 90 percent of those using social media access system information through their phones. The Agency currently has about 133,000 followers across its four social media platforms: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and a blog called The Platform, which are particularly useful for increasing brand awareness and customer engagement.

Sound Transit’s Twitter followers have increased 240 percent since 2016, when the Capitol Hill and University stations opened. The platform is used for answering customer questions, engaging during service disruptions, and highlighting Agency progress and milestones. Facebook followers have increased 67 percent since 2016. Facebook is used to increase agency and project awareness and provide major service news and other information. Instagram followers have increased 342 percent since 2016. The platform is used to promote general Sound Transit awareness, highlight service and construction progress, and connect with younger audiences. The Platform is Sound Transit’s blog, which provides in depth answers to common questions, showcases construction progress, and educates about service changes. The Platform has 1,800 subscribers and has had 500,000 page views since its launch in 2017.

Connect 2020

Marie Olson, Corridor Operations Director, John Sleavin, Executive Technical Advisor, Carrie Avila Mooney, Central Corridor Manager, and Aaron Salinas, Rail Activation Manager, gave an overview of the Agency’s plans for operating reduced light rail service during a ten-week period from January to mid-March, 2020, while portions of the International District/Chinatown Station (ID Station) close for construction that connects the East Link light rail extension to the downtown tunnel. This effort is known as the Connect 2020 project.

In order to accommodate heavy construction for Connect 2020 while continuing to provide service for 80,000 current weekday Link riders, light rail service will operate in single-tracking fashion through the downtown tunnel during the 10-week time frame. This configuration will allow trains to operate on one set of tracks while the opposite tracks are under construction and will bisect the current line of service, with Pioneer Square Station acting as a terminus. One line will run from the University of Washington to Pioneer Square, the other from Angle Lake to Pioneer Square. A temporary platform will be built at Pioneer Square to accommodate transfers between the two lines. Trains will run every 12 minutes at all

times of day, seven days a week, compared to current operations, where train runs every six minutes during weekday peak hours and every 10 – 15 minutes at other times. All trains will have four cars in order to provide as much capacity as possible and offset the longer waits. The ID Station will close completely for three weekends during the 10-week period, during which time shuttle bus service will be provided from SODO to Westlake and all intermediate stations.

National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) Summary Report

Peter Rogoff, Chief Executive Officer, briefed the COP on the summary of the NTSB's findings regarding the December 18, 2017, derailment of Amtrak 501 near DuPont, WA. Safety is the most important of Sound Transit's six core values and is fundamental to its daily work. The Agency was surprised at the extent to which it was singled out in the NTSB report, which found that all four agencies involved, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), the Oregon State Department of Transportation, Amtrak, and Sound Transit, had made mistakes in the effort to run new train service on the Point Defiance Bypass.

Sound Transit, as the result of a unique and complicated agreement needed to purchase the track from the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF), is the owner of a ten-mile segment over which it will never operate service. A complex relationship also exists among the regulatory agencies involved. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), which provided some funding for the Bypass project, has statutory authority over rail safety, but has balked at the NTSB's recommendation that it certify rail safety plans of operators under its jurisdiction. The NTSB has called for the implementation of positive train control (PTC) for decades, but lacks the regulatory authority to require it.

At the time of the derailment, Amtrak and other railroad operators had another year within which to meet the FRA's requirement that PTC be fully operational. While Amtrak was responsible for training its own engineers, Sound Transit was responsible for making sure that the training was adequate. Signage was also an issue. The Agency followed the customary practice of having a speed warning sign installed two miles back from the curve where the train derailed. However, Amtrak contended that the two-mile marker was a freight practice that its own engineer overlooked while anticipating other signs and signals closer to the curve.

All of the agencies involved could have done a better job in one way or another. Sound Transit is acutely aware of its responsibilities in relation to Amtrak and has taken several steps since the derailment to respond to the hazards identified by the NTSB. The CEO is also in the process of finalizing the scope for an independent third party review and investigation of the accident. The COP will receive a briefing on the findings of the review when it is complete.

Discussion

The social media overview was an interesting primer on the Agency's use of social technologies to engage and inform riders. The Connect 2020 program is a visionary effort that should ease a major construction challenge for East Link. Peter Rogoff's candor regarding the Amtrak derailment was noted and appreciated.

The summary of the May 16, 2019, COP meeting was approved as amended.

Member Reports

Phil Lovell – A quiet zone being implemented in Edmonds to reduce horn volumes at railroad grade crossings has temporarily resulted in more noise rather than less while railroad engineers use on-board

horns and the newly installed wayside system also sends out a more isolated sound. The problem should be corrected when the new system is fully implemented on June 7, 2019.

Chris Karnes noted that after reading the National Transportation Safety Board's findings regarding the derailment of Amtrak 501, he questions whether an agency other than Sound Transit would be better suited to operating a heavy railroad in that section of the corridor.

Scott Lampe noted that there is lots of discussion taking place in Bellevue regarding existing bike lanes and the possibility of adding more to an already dense area.

2019 Focus Areas

- Adequacy and appropriateness of system access to stations
- Ridership on Sounder North
- Social equity
- Awareness of emerging technologies and their impacts
- Labor costs and labor supply
- Publicizing of peer comparison data
- Asset management
- Reliability and availability of federal, state, local and third party funding sources
- Customer experience focus that includes the entire region and all of the transit agencies within it
- Customer experience metrics that focus more specifically on the customer experience

Next Meeting: June 20, 2019, 8:30 – 11:00 AM, in the Santa Fe Room at Union Station