

Sound Transit Citizen Oversight Panel Virtual Meeting Summary

October 6, 2021

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

COP Members Absent: None

Others Present: Kathy Albert, Katie Flores, Adam Montee

Marketing and Social Media Update

- Tim Healy – Director of Marketing
- Bruce Gray – Supervisor – Social Media
- Kathryn Van Sanden – Marketing Manager

Tim Healy, Bruce Gray, and Kathryn Van Sanden gave an overview of their team’s work since 2020. Building passenger confidence in the safety of the system has been a priority as ridership has gradually increased from an almost 85 percent decline at the beginning of the pandemic. Several campaigns were introduced to reassure riders that trains and buses were available, safe, and reliable when riders were ready to return. Information about reduced fares and the economic benefits of transit were emphasized, as was psychological safety and inclusion.

Support of ridership was also an emphasis of marketing work related to the Northgate Link opening. The Agency worked with its regional partners to develop common themes to welcome riders back to the system. A new line naming convention was introduced, and print campaigns were unveiled at each new station and onboard vehicles that highlighted new connections and travel times along the route. Rather than one large public opening, each station hosted a series of locally produced and supported events. Sponsorships raised nearly \$170,000 to offset opening day expenses. A social media campaign to build excitement for the opening 150,000 resulted in followers and two million total impressions. Sound Transit’s blog, *The Platform*, built awareness for the new line in almost weekly stories beginning in July 2021.

Opening weekend data showed that outreach efforts reached more than 270,000 via social media, where feedback was abundant and positive. Agency staff and contractors who worked for many years to bring the project to fruition were deeply gratified to see the public’s enthusiastic response.

Rebuilding ridership and preparing for the opening of the Hilltop Tacoma Link Extension in 2022 are the focus of upcoming campaigns, which will continue to emphasize health, and physical and psychological safety. The Agency is working with major employers and transit advocates to encourage ridership and address safety in the downtown Seattle core. The benefits of ORCA, and how to use it, will be key messages, especially for current Tacoma Link riders who may be unfamiliar with the fare payment system.

Quarterly Conversation with CEO Peter Rogoff

- Peter Rogoff – CEO

CEO Peter Rogoff began by reviewing a presentation he'd recently made to the Board about the Agency's work and upcoming milestones. Although the realignment process absorbed much of the staff and Board's attention for more than a year and a half, work continued on several significant initiatives. New line names based on international best practices were introduced prior to the Northgate Link opening. A passenger information management system (PIMS) will be introduced in 2022 to make signage more intuitive and provide better real time information. Vastly improved customer metrics are now available that allow the Agency to track outcomes against its vision of safe, available, dependable, clean, and informed service for all riders. Progress on these goals is provided in regular reports to the Board and the public through a public dashboard. Upgrades to ORCA will begin in early 2022, with a new website and app, new validators and TVMs, more payment options, and faster and more responsive technology. Digital signage and advertising displays will launch in 2023.

The Agency's vibrant transit-oriented development program includes 2,500 housing units built or planned, 1,500 of which are affordable. In 2022, 614 units will open at Roosevelt and First Hill. The development next to the Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF) East will have 500 units of housing and 400,000 square feet of office space. In partnership with Sound Transit, Amazon has dedicated \$100 million to accelerate the creation of up to 1,200 new affordable housing units on the Agency's surplus properties near light rail stations.

The parking management program is preparing to restart its SOV/HOV permits as ridership recovers. The program will expand to include daily parking fees by the time that East Link opens. Plans are underway to bring on a new vendor to help with the program.

A fare ambassador pilot program has been launched with two fare ambassador supervisors and 11 fare ambassadors who have completed a two-week training course. New uniforms have been designed to support the focus of the ambassadors on rider engagement rather than fare enforcement. There will likely be a period of transition as riders, who rode fare-free during the height of the pandemic, become accustomed to returning to paid rides.

The 2020 service plan is focused on restoring service equitably. Service will reflect new all-day service patterns, prioritize equality as service is added, emphasize rider and community input, prepare to add more service if ridership increases, and anticipate changes that may come with future system expansion. (NOTE: The COP will be briefed on the 2022 service plan November 3, 2021.)

Alternatives development for the Everett Link Extension and OMF North began in the spring. Early scoping and public engagement will begin in the fall.

Sound Transit reached a notable milestone in December 2020 when the Agency became the first light rail system in the nation to run on 100 percent clean energy.

The Agency's work toward becoming an anti-racist organization continues. More than 500 employees are engaged in a proposed anti-racist strategy. Ten diverse, employee-led groups have been created, implicit bias training is required of all employees, and special training is required for people leaders. Five pilot projects are underway using racial equity toolkits. An updated disadvantaged business enterprise (DBE) strategy and goal will be presented to the Board later this year.

A Portfolio Services Office (PSO) has been created to provide core services, including agencywide tools, systems processes, and oversight. Accessible standards and guidelines will be developed regarding engineering authority, project controls, and project management. The office will closely collaborate with

other departments to incorporate Triunity's cost control recommendations and seek additional revenue and financial capacity. (NOTE: The COP will be briefed on the 2022 PSO on November 3, 2021.)

The office of Strategic Business Services is undertaking a continuous process improvement program to improve general engineering contracting, work orders, and permitting with other jurisdictions. Processes are being developed for the new PSO. Simple, standard templates for policies, procedures and other manuals are being developed, and improved record management systems are in design.

The pandemic created multiple challenges for the Agency's staff, which has performed with distinction throughout the past year and a half. Staffing levels have been maintained by redeploying staff internally where needed and creating a Talent Connect program for temporary assignments and development opportunities. Only five FTEs have been added in the past year. With the exception of the Hilltop Tacoma project, all of the Agency's major capital projects continue to meet their baselined budgets and schedules, thanks to the dedication of Sound Transit's staff and contractors.

COP members asked what tools the Agency has to address unforeseen issues like inaccurate utilities maps, disruptive street work, and local business impacts that have contributed to delays and cost increases on the Hilltop Tacoma project. CEO Rogoff noted that old, poor quality as-built maps were a primary cause of problems on the project. He acknowledged that in hindsight, the Agency might have reviewed the maps more critically from the beginning. While the City of Tacoma can't be held liable for inaccurate maps, the Agency and the City have been working closely to address the issues. It helps to have people from the City on the Board, whether Sound Transit is ripping up streets or negotiating responsibility for cost overruns. Interjurisdictional relationships become very important to what can be achieved when problems arise. In other examples, the CEO meets monthly with the mayors of Federal Way, Kent, and Redmond, none of whom are on the Board. Strong relationships have been built over time, to the benefit of all involved. Developing a relationship with the next mayor of Seattle is a priority of the CEO prior to his departure.

The issue of betterments arises in most major projects. Sound Transit is obligated to leave a site in the condition in which it was found prior to construction, while each city has a vision of what transit can do within its community. The Agency's view is often narrower than that of the local jurisdiction, which also controls the permitting process necessary for the project to proceed. Expectations about what is built and who pays for it are frequently at odds. In spite of these issues, the most significant drivers of cost increases on Sound Transit's projects are the costs of property acquisition and the lack of competition in construction contracting.

In response to a question about advice for his successor, the CEO noted that numbers are fragile. Financial projections over 25 years are bound to change for any number of reasons. The world won't stay the way it was on the day of an election, which makes it very difficult to deliver projects just as envisioned when the vote took place. Leaders need to stay nimble. The Agency's role is different from that of the Board, which, as a group of elected officials, must work within a much more political environment. It's critical to insulate the staff from the politics. Finally, the Agency has the same obligation to every taxpayer and every rider, whether they voted for the plan or not.

COP members thanked the CEO for his detailed, forthright presentation, and for his willingness to speak with them on a quarterly basis. They commended the PSO initiative, which will result in fewer individual decisions and better management oversight. They congratulated the CEO on the very successful opening of Northgate Link. Members expressed their appreciation for his work in a very challenging job and his willingness to change within the role. They noted that he had done good work under difficult circumstances, and would be missed.

Discussion

Marketing and Social Media – COP members were very impressed by the ongoing work of the marketing team. There were questions about how the transition to paid fares would be implemented when Hilltop Tacoma Link opens.

Conversation with the CEO – Please see the concluding paragraph of the quarterly conversation with the CEO, above.

The September 15, 2021, virtual COP meeting summary was not complete. Adoption of the summary was deferred until the October 20, 2021, meeting.

Member Reports

None

2021 Focus Areas

- Adequacy and appropriateness of station access, including use of emerging technologies
- Monitoring and review of social equity, racial equity, fare enforcement, and inclusion policies
- Uses of peer comparison data
- Asset management plan progress
- Reliability and availability of federal, state, local, and third-party funding sources
- Customer experience focused metrics across the RTA region and transit agencies within it
- COVID-19, contingency planning, and disaster preparedness
- Program realignment, interagency cooperation and interoperability
- Coordination with local jurisdictions to mitigate impacts of unauthorized parking around stations

Outstanding Questions

None

Next Virtual Meeting: Wednesday, October 20, 8:30 – 11:00 AM