

## **Sound Transit Citizen Oversight Panel Virtual Meeting Summary August 5, 2020**

**COP Members Present:** Fred Auch, Scott Lampe, Dan Parker, James Peyton, Bill Roach, Larry Sauvé, Joe Scorcio, Paul Thompson

**COP Members Absent:** Hally Bert, Brett Johnson, Helen Powell, Dan Santon

**Others Present:** Shelly Brown, Kathy Albert, Katie Flores, Taylor Wilkinson

### **Safety Performance Review**

- Moises Gutierrez, Acting Chief Executive Safety and Quality Officer
- Robert Taaffe, Director of Construction and System Safety
- Stephen Misczuk, Acting Director of Employee and Transit Safety
- Patrick Johnson, Director, Audit Division

Moises Gutierrez, Acting Chief Executive Safety and Quality Officer, gave an overview of the Safety Department structure and divisions, and introduced its leadership team. The Department is in the process of a national search for a Chief Safety Officer, and is also undergoing an inter-departmental re-organization effort that incorporates input from private industry and Agency staff. Work includes refining the safety function, developing an Agency Safety Plan, and implementing a safety management system.

Robert Taaffe, Director of Construction and System Safety, described the work of the construction safety department in reviewing construction site work plans, hazard analyses, and weekly site surveys. Sound Transit's 2019 reportable injury rate, a common metric used by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), was well below the state average of reportable injuries. The Northgate, East Link and Lynnwood light rail projects were below the national average, the Hilltop Tacoma project was very slightly above the national average, and the Operations and Maintenance Facility East (OMFE) was somewhat above the national average. The statistics are used to analyze trends in injury rates and bring them down as much as possible.

Lost time rates are another common OSHA metric that tracks the number of incidents that result in time away from work. Sound Transit's 2019 lost time rates were well below the state average. There was no lost time reported for the Northgate, Hilltop Tacoma, or Lynnwood projects. The East Link project was slightly below the national average and the OMF East project was somewhat above the national average. The majority of lost time injuries were strains and sprains, often related to an aging work force. Body positioning, ergonomics and other techniques are being used to reduce the risk of injury.

Stephen Misczuk, Acting Director of Employee and Transit Safety, discussed the department's role in the safety oversight of operating modes. Transit safety data for 2019 showed that ST Express had 19 vehicle collisions, the highest number among the modes, which is typical due to the environment on streets and highways where the express bus service operates. Link light rail had 16 collisions, many of them caused by motorists making illegal left hand turns in front of oncoming trains. Sound Transit is working with the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) to reduce the number of collisions, especially along the at grade alignment on Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. Tacoma Link had four collisions and Sounder commuter rail had three collisions.

There were four pedestrian collisions involving ST Express, none of which were fatalities. Sounder also had four collisions, three of which were fatalities. Of the fatalities, one was an official suicide, another a suspected suicide, and the third was an illegal crossing.

Sound Transit employee health and safety data showed positive work place safety. Injury rates were lower in 2019 than the previous year in spite of a higher number of employees. Recorded incident rates and days away/restriction transfer rates were well below the state and national averages.

Patrick Johnson, Director of Audit Division, reported that Sound Transit is on track to complete the three-year audit cycle required for all modes by state and federal law. The Federal Transit Administration had recently complemented the Agency on the completeness of its safety program.

Moises Gutierrez discussed the Agency's Covid-19 management plan. All front line staff wear face coverings, practice good hygiene, and don't come to work when ill. Fleet vehicles are routinely cleaned and disinfected, and special care is taken to clean high touch surfaces. All contractors submitted Covid-19 management plans before returning to construction sites, which are required to maintain hygiene stations, personal protective equipment, and six feet of separation between workers whenever possible. A return to workplace plan for Agency staff is being developed and phased consistent with state requirements.

Finally, work toward resumption of service on the Point Defiance Bypass is ongoing, but no date has been set, and won't be until all applicable recommendations and findings, including those contained in the final report of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), are complete.

### **Passenger Confidence and Covid-19 Operations Impacts**

- Russ Arnold, Chief Customer Experience Officer

Russ Arnold discussed several scenarios necessary for Sound Transit to return to more usual, pre-pandemic levels of service, which was ramped down in March in response to dramatically lower ridership. A customer confidence task force has been created to assess what passengers need to have confidence in using the system. The ability to maintain social distancing, increased demand, commute normalization, and demand responsiveness are key criteria that vary by route and mode. The Agency is working in conjunction with its regional partners on a research-based approach through the use of customer and employer surveys and best practices research, and is also engaged in knowledge sharing with transit agencies around the country and through an international workshop. A certified industrial hygienist has been hired who co-authored the American Public Transportation Association's (APTA) guidance, *Cleaning and Disinfecting Transit Vehicles During a Contagious Virus Pandemic*.

Sixty-four percent of respondents to a rider feedback survey plan to resume riding transit, or riding more frequently than before the pandemic. Twenty-five percent plan to ride less often. About sixty percent of those who don't plan to ride reported concerns about getting ill on transit, or expecting to work from home more often. Seventeen percent reported they would no longer be making the same trips, and twelve percent have found another way to travel.

Recommendations from the research to date include achieving one hundred percent passenger and employee compliance with the use of face coverings, increasing cleaning protocols, analyzing opportunities to increase airflow and filtration, communicating passenger loads by route and time of day, increasing passenger communications overall, and assessing the feasibility of providing hand sanitizer.

Customer-focused communications strategies have been developed to reach current and former riders, with a special emphasis on reaching those facing serious economic impacts. Outreach to the multi-lingual community will take place through ads in Spanish and other languages. An ad campaign, *We've Got You Covered*, features trains and buses with masks on the front and text asking passengers to cover their faces when riding. Touch-free payment and fare checking is encouraged through ORCA and Transit GO Tickets, and reduced fare options are being emphasized. A pilot project in late June distributed more than 1,000 reusable masks at four separate, high ridership locations.

## **Discussion**

COP members noted the complexity of the issues addressed in both presentations. The discussion of passenger safety during the coronavirus pandemic was dense with statistics and science, but much is still unknown about viral transmission in public transit. It was suggested that Sound Transit consider working with researchers at the University of Washington or another entity to develop a better understanding of how transmission on public transportation occurs.

The summary of the July 22, 2020, virtual COP meeting was approved as amended.

## **Member Reports**

None

## **2020 Focus Areas**

- Adequacy and appropriateness of station access
- Monitoring and review of social equity, racial equity, fare enforcement, and inclusion policies
- Implications and impacts of emerging technologies
- Workforce development and measurement of outcomes
- Uses of peer comparison data
- Asset management plan progress
- 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
- Safety performance and function
- Contingency planning and disaster preparedness
- Cost management for the System Expansion Implementation Plan
- Impacts of Covid-19 on system operations and program realignment
- Program realignment, interagency cooperation and interoperability

## **Outstanding Questions**

What is the status of discussions between Sound Transit and the City of Seattle regarding repair or replacement of the West Seattle Bridge?

Next Virtual Meeting: Wednesday, August 19, 2020, 8:30 – 11:00 AM