

Sound Transit Citizen Oversight Panel Virtual Meeting Summary September 2, 2020

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

COP Members Absent: Hally Bert, Daniel Santon

Others Present: Shelly Brown, Kathy Albert, Katie Flores

Agency Covid-19 Response

- Mary Cummings, Chief Administrative Officer

Mary Cummings discussed Sound Transit's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which began two months after her arrival at the Agency and triggered enormous changes in every aspect of operations that continue six months later. The starting point for the team was a pre-existing emergency management plan that was consistent with a national incident management system designed to be adapted to any type of emergency. The plan includes a section on pandemics that forms the basis of the Agency's Covid-19 response. Actions were taken in three major areas: employee safety, transit operations, and system expansion.

A major early hurdle in Sound Transit's response was obtaining sufficient technology to enable both the Agency's staff and its numerous partner employees to work remotely. Safety standards were developed and communicated internally and externally to a wide array of contractors and subcontractors. On the operations side, maintaining service with limited operator availability and ensuring operator safety presented significant challenges. Regional collaboration was key, facilitated at the beginning of the pandemic by thrice weekly calls among regional partners that currently take place once a week.

Seven cases of the virus have been confirmed among Sound Transit employees. Concern for operator safety led the Agency to pause fare collection, which had the unintended consequence of creating additional unsafe conditions for essential workers as non-destination ridership increased. Operator safety has been the first consideration as fare collections have resumed, initially on Sounder and Link service, where there is no public contact with operators. Passenger perception of safety remains a challenge, as does consistent use of social distancing and face coverings. Mask use is generally about 80 to 90 percent, with somewhat lower compliance in the evening. Riders without masks are reminded to wear them; however, there is no removal from the system for those who fail to do so. Sound Transit is distributing free masks to the public using a supply provided by the Federal Transit Administration.

Northgate Link Extension

- Rick Capka, Deputy Project Director

Rick Capka gave an update on the Northgate Link Extension, a 4.3-mile light rail extension from the University of Washington to Northgate that includes 3.5 miles of twin tunnel, three light rail stations, and one parking garage. Transit oriented development projects are planned for each station site. The project will provide 14-minute service between Northgate and Downtown, and serve three academic facilities and three business districts. Daily ridership of 60,000 is projected by 2030.

The project team includes 25 dedicated Sound Transit staff, additional Agency support staff, design and construction management consultants, and 11 separate construction contracts. Project budget, including

contingency, is approximately \$1.9 billion. About \$1.7 billion has been incurred to date. The project is estimated to be slightly more than 96 percent complete, and is on schedule to open for revenue service in September 2021. Current estimates show more than \$52 million in savings at completion.

Safety is a core Agency value and the top priority on the Northgate project. Project safety metrics through July 2020, show recordable injury and lost time injury rates that were substantially below the state average. An accident on August 25, 2020, involving a hi-rail vehicle injured four project workers, two of whom were hospitalized and released. The accident was still under investigation at time of the COP briefing and all on-rail work was suspended pending the outcome of the investigation.

Discussion

Agency Covid-19 response - COP members questioned whether it would be possible to enforce mask requirements at identified hot spots. It was suggested that the Agency initiate a study of Covid-19 transmission on public transportation rather than waiting for the outcomes of studies currently underway. The need to respond to social justice and antiracism efforts in service planning was noted. Monitoring public perceptions of safety was discussed, and a recommendation was made that the Agency learn what transit operators internationally have done to address the issue.

Northgate Link Extension – COP members appreciated the excellent presentation and commended the project team and its leader, Don Davis, for their work. Concerns were expressed about station access and bus service realignment. There were also questions about lessons learned from the tunneling portion of the project and the transition from project completion to operations.

The summary of the August 19, 2020, COP meeting was approved.

Member Reports

Brett Johnson noted his concern that Pierce County appears to be underserved in comparison to other subareas. He planned to participate in the virtual public hearing regarding the Agency's transportation development plan, which was scheduled for September 3, 2020.

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

- 1) Has the Agency considered contracting with the University of Washington or another appropriate institution to study the transmission of Covid-19 on public transportation?
- 2) What is the cost of keeping major projects shovel ready while realignment work takes place?
- 3) Follow up regarding mask enforcement: although direct enforcement would be too difficult and expensive, would it be possible to conduct spot enforcement, particularly at stations where compliance is known to be low?
- 4) Is it possible to record COP comments for potential feedback to presenters?

Next Virtual Meeting: Wednesday, September 16, 2020, 8:30 – 11:00 AM