

## Sound Transit Citizen Oversight Panel Virtual Meeting Summary October 21, 2020

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

**COP Members Absent:** Brett Johnson, Daniel Santon, Larry Sauv  (due to technical difficulties)

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

### Service Implementation Plan

- Brian de Place, System Planning Director
- Michael Couvrette, Service Planning Manager
- Matt Shelden, Deputy Executive Director of Planning and Integration

Brian de Place, Michael Couvrette, and Matt Shelden discussed Sound Transit's service response to Covid-19 and gave an overview of the 2021 service plan. Ridership was down slightly from the previous year at the beginning of 2020, and dropped by 85 percent in April in response to Covid-19 shutdowns. A shortage of operators also contributed to the Agency's decision to implement an emergency service reduction. A smaller core-system was developed that prioritized routes with the most riders while balancing equity considerations. Most overlapping rush hour service was temporarily suspended, while all-day coverage and access to most regional destinations was maintained. Sound Transit worked with its partner agencies to fill gaps in the system, support equitable access, and maintain adequate service for essential workers and transit dependent riders.

Operators began to return to work in early summer, and in September additional service was added and adjusted to meet new travel patterns. Link trips were increased to eight minutes during peak ridership periods, 15 minutes during off-peak, and 30 minutes during late night periods. Sounder South service increased to nine roundtrips, and Sounder North service maintained two roundtrips. Tacoma Link continued full service, while ST Express added 20 percent more trips on routes that had retained high ridership.

Continued dependable, sustainable service, particularly for low income and minority populations most reliant on public transportation, will be a priority in 2021. Outreach efforts, always a fundamental component of SIP development, produced 10 times more responses than in a normal year. Results are currently being processed, and will be used to assess travel patterns and service needs included in the final plan, which is scheduled to be adopted by the Board in November.

Sound Transit and its operating partners have been working for several years on planning for the restructuring of service when Northgate Link opens in 2021. Most I-5 north corridor routes will be rerouted. Route 510 will continue to run directly to downtown, while Route 522 will terminate at Roosevelt Station with headways reduced from 30 minutes to 15 minutes. As Link expands, more ST Express service will connect to Link rather than truncating. Additional information is available in the Annual Service Plan, available online at: <https://www.soundtransit.org/system-expansion/planning-future-service/annual-sip>.

## **Tacoma Dome Link Extension and Hilltop Tacoma Link**

- Curvie Hawkins, TDLE Project Director
- Madeleine Greathouse, HTLE Project Director

Curvie Hawkins gave an overview of the TDLE, which will add nearly 10 miles of almost entirely elevated track between Federal Way and Tacoma. The project includes a river crossing and four new light rail stations, three of which will connect to other regional transit services. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is expected to be published in 2022, and a final EIS in mid to late 2023. The project, which is subject to the Board's realignment process, has not been baselined and therefore has no project budget at this time.

The South Federal Way Station segment includes a preferred alternative at Enchanted Parkway Station, and 500 stalls of surface or structured parking. The Fife Station segment also includes 500 stalls of surface or structured parking, and three alignment alternatives. The Portland Avenue Station segment includes a preferred alternative at Portland Avenue Station, and two light rail only bridge crossing options of the Puyallup River. The Tacoma Dome Station segment includes a preferred alternative at 25th Street West and pedestrian and bike bridge options for all station alternatives. A Close-to-Souder alignment and station alternative were developed at the Board's direction. An online open house is available until November 2, 2020, to view station design concepts and share feedback on bike and pedestrian station access alternatives.

Madeleine Greathouse gave an update on the HTLE, a 2.4-mile extension of Tacoma Link that includes six new stations and one relocated station. When completed, service will run every ten minutes. The project was baselined in September 2017, with a budget of \$217.3 million in year of expenditure dollars and re-baselined with an additional \$35,400,000, for a total project budget of \$252.7 million in June 2020. Construction is 64 percent complete, utility work is substantially complete, the track slab is 70 percent complete, and final design reviews of the vehicle contract are underway. Revenue service is scheduled for May 2022.

Outreach efforts on the complex project have been especially robust. A diverse range of stakeholders includes numerous small businesses, the largest employer in Tacoma at Tacoma General Hospital, an historic high school and countless activists and residents. Ongoing efforts to encourage support of local businesses were redesigned during Covid-19 closures, and have yielded positive results throughout the corridor. Staff continue to monitor and mitigate impacts to cost and schedule. Key issues and challenges include major construction during a pandemic, maintaining a high level safety awareness and accident prevention, design issues, potential construction contract claims, stakeholder and neighborhood construction impacts, public outreach during construction, testing and commission planning, and impacts to operations. A lessons learned initiative will be a regular part of future quarterly project updates.

### **Discussion**

System Implementation Plan – COP members requested additional information regarding coordination between Sound Transit and its partner agencies regarding service changes and implementation. Staff agreed to provide follow-up. COP members noted that the question would be a good one for the CEO during his scheduled discussion with the COP on November 18, 2020.

TDLE – Questions were raised about the proposed Portland Avenue station location, which is only half a mile from the Tacoma Dome Station in an area with no residential or commercial density other than the Emerald Queen Casino complex.

THLE – The project was challenging from the start, and will likely remain so until it's completed. COP members were encouraged at the progress that has been made.

The summary of the October 7, 2020, COP meeting was approved.

### **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**

- 1) Clarification of the roles of partner agencies regarding Sound Transit service changes and implementation. NOTE: This topic will be discussed at the December 16, 2020, COP meeting.

**Next Virtual Meeting:** Wednesday, November 4, 2020, 8:30 – 11:00 AM