

Sound Transit Citizen Oversight Panel Meeting Summary November 21, 2019

COP Members Present: Fred Auch, Janice Berlin, Scott Lampe, Helen Powell, Bill Roach, Dan Santon, Larry Sauvé, Paul Thompson

COP Members Absent: Sharon Grader, Dan Parker, James Peyton

Others Present: Shelly Brown, Kathy Albert, members of the public

Phase Gate

Claire Turpel Chase, Program Manager in the Project Transition Office, gave an overview of Sound Transit's current Phase Gate Program (the Program). The original Program was established in 2005 by then Chief Financial Officer Brian McCartan to provide an internal project management oversight process, evaluate the readiness of projects to advance, provide transparency and support collaboration. The program was revised in 2012 and redesigned in 2018 through the Agency's Continuous Process Improvement program to minimize redundancies between processes, create flexibility for alternative delivery methods, and increase structure and certainty for project teams. A structured, interdisciplinary Phase Gate Committee was created to provide more certainty and clear decision-making for project teams. The Program was also dissociated from the Board of Directors process to reduce redundancy for project teams.

The previous Program had three phases and eight gates; the revised program kept the main phases and changed the gates to six: initiate project, select delivery method, complete environmental/enter design and construction, establish baseline, enter operations, and close out. The changes included eliminating three gates that were somewhat redundant and closely tied to the design-bid-build delivery method, and adding a gate early in the process to determine the delivery method. Documentation of readiness is required prior to each gate and included in the Phase Gate report.

Discussion of COP Letter to Finance and Audit Committee

Katie Flores, Sound Transit Board Administrator, and Gana Byambaa, Acting Director of Internal Audit, discussed the Agency's updated Board committee structure and responsibilities. Effective in 2019, the former Audit & Reporting Committee was dissolved and the Finance & Audit Committee (the FAC) was established. In order to retain opportunities for sharing the COP's historical input on performance audit topics and the internal audit work plan, the COP Chair or designee has been invited to attend the December 19, 2019, FAC meeting and share its observations, verbally and in writing.

It was agreed that the COP would use the Agency's preliminary list of ten 2020 audits and two performance audits to rank its own audit priorities for the coming year, and provide them in a letter to be presented at the December 19, 2019, FAC meeting. It was noted that the Agency will consider the COP's recommendations, but may not incorporate all of them due to staffing or other reasons.

2020 Service Implementation Plan

Michael Couvrette, Service Planning Manager, and Brian de Place, Director of Operations Support Services, gave an overview of the 2020 Service Implementation Plan (SIP), including ridership trends and 2020 service planning. The SIP process is conducted annually to manage service changes, monitor service performance and quality, incorporate partner agency and public input, and undertake a Title VI equity analysis.

Ridership is expected to double overall in the next five years with the opening of seven major new projects. At the same time, ST Express ridership is expected to decline due to congestion and some replacement by Link and bus rapid transit (BRT). Year to date, ridership on ST Express has declined by 4.5 percent, and on Link by .4 percent. Ridership has increased on Tacoma Link by 4.2 percent, and on Sounder overall by .7 percent. Current Sounder North ridership has stabilized at about 1500 riders per day, down from about 1700 riders per day for about the past two years. Sounder North represents ten percent of all Sounder rides. Ninety percent of rides are on Sounder South, which is at capacity because of existing freight traffic in the corridor. Sounder ridership in general is influenced by the number of weekends and holidays in any given month.

Three major service changes are proposed for 2020: 1) Deliver new service to South Lake Union by combining Routes 540/541 to create Route 544. The new service will support the restructure of King County Metro (Metro) Route 255 as part of the North Eastside Mobility Project (NEMP). 2) Discontinue stops on Route 566 to simplify service, improve reliability, and maintain access. The change will impact only 16 riders at two stops, who will still be served by Route 560. 3) Improve reliability on Route 577/578 by providing weekend service to Auburn every 30 minutes.

Public input on the proposed changes was sought in September and October 2019. Of 700 riders reached in person, 377 completed a survey that resulted in modifications to the proposed elimination of Route 541. The updated proposal still eliminates a majority of trips on Route 541 in order to shift resources to new Route 544, but up to ten one way trips on Route 541 will be temporarily retained in response to concerns about overcrowding between Overlake and the University of Washington if Route 541 is completely eliminated.

Discussion

COP members were pleased that the Phase Gate process, which has worked well over the years, continues to be reviewed and improved. Credit was given to Kathy Albert and the entire Continuous Process Improvement team for refining the Program to better suit the agency's project needs. Appreciation was also expressed for the impressive work of the SIP team.

The November 7, 2019, COP meeting summary was approved.

Member Reports

Dan Santon expressed support for the Agency's decision not to name its light rail corridor "the Red Line."

Larry Sauvé reported that he had attended a breakfast meeting of the Downtown Seattle Association, at which the subject of bus volumes, noise impacts and other issues along Third Avenue were discussed. These and other issues will likely have continued significance as Metro reconfigures bus service as additional light rail service comes online.

Janice Berlin reported that she had recently spoken with her successor at Metro, which has just completed its annual adverse weather table top exercise. Since 2009, Metro has had a very robust adverse weather plan that is interesting and effective when activated.

Paul Thompson noted that the Overlake garage is a beautiful facility that is nearing completion but may not be put in use for three or more years while East Link is completed. Existing bus operations could be greatly improved if new pavement currently being installed could be used.

Helen Powell noted that proposed new Route 544 would be a great benefit to the University of Washington (UW) campus at South Lake Union. She reported that effective July 1, 2019, all classified staff at the UW receive free transit passes under the U PASS program.

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

Outstanding Questions

- Federal Way Link – TOD related questions regarding property acquisition and station access

Next Meeting: Thursday, December 5, 2019, 8:30 – 11:00 AM, Santa Fe Room, Union Station