

Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Virtual Meeting Summary

February 8, 2023

COP Members Present: James Peyton, Larry Sauvé, Joe Scorcio, Paul Thompson, Carston Curd, Diana Cambronero Venegas, Gabriel Clark, Scott Lampe, Tracy Oster, Charlotte Murry, Lucas Simons, Tom Norcott

COP Members Absent: Tina Pierce, Lorenzo Frazier, Helen Powell

Others Present: Kathy Albert, Katie Flores, Adam Montee, Chris Hoffman, Billy A, and Jana Ward

Rider Experience Survey and Data Collection

- Michael Berman, Deputy Director of Research and Innovation

Sound Transit staff began with a description of the research program, which focusses on information that can help better serve riders. Staff then transitioned to an overview and methodology of the passenger experience survey. It's conducted two times a year, they sample all modes, and the focus is to learn about the passenger experience. They have people take surveys through scanning a QR code through on-site signage, existing email and text alert lists, ORCA card holder lists, and the website. They average between 4,000 and 5,000 respondents, except in the summer of 2022, which they attribute to survey fatigue (the summer survey came out just a couple months after the spring survey and was part of a pilot to get input from tourists). The on-site cards/signs yielded a small sample of riders while they were on-site. Survey respondents are not representative of rider demographics as respondents are predominantly white. They have found that cleanliness and safety matter, and in general there was an overall downward grade on safety and cleanliness ratings between fall 2020 and summer 2022. They have also found that they received higher complaints regarding general disturbances and security presence. Staff said they have seen that safety and cleanliness are very important but their performance needs improvement. Safety and cleanliness have mattered more to riders in recent years. Within the safety category, the most important elements are personal health and safety and level of personal safety when law enforcement or security are not present.

Staff then talked about differences in responses by mode. A series of questions are asked to get at passenger experience. There are different responses across modes. Link and ST Express do well on ease of use but struggle on high standards of service and that Sound Transit values passengers. Link also shows a decline on cleanliness ranking between fall 2020 and summer 2022. With regards to dependability by mode ST Express does poorly compared to other modes. This is expected because the ST Express busses use shared Right of Way.

Staff said they have learned lessons and are testing responses, including putting in station agents in more stations, doing more cleaning, new protocols and trash cans, partnering with social service providers, testing new seating, and making changes to the survey. They are considering changing how they ask questions and the type of questions they ask, to get more granular information about location and routes.

Fare Engagement Policy and Practices Update

- Russ Arnold, Chief Passenger Experience and Innovation Officer
- Sean Dennerlein, Deputy Director, Passenger Experience

Sound Transit staff began by answering an earlier question about fare ambassadors conducting surveys. They said that they have found it would take away from their main duties of conducting outreach around fares, and that they haven't been able to fully staff those positions. Sound Transit currently has one ambassador for every 174,000 riders and ridership is now above 2019 levels. Staff then talked about how Sound Transit used to enforce fares and what happened at ongoing interactions. Non-paying passengers now get two warnings within a 12-month period without a penalty. Ambassadors also provide information about resources passengers can access to help with fares. At the third interaction, non-paying passengers can participate in a focus group, take a transit education class, sign a commitment to pay in the future, load \$50 on an ORCA card, or pay a \$50 fine. At the fourth interaction there are the same opportunities as at the third, but additional options include loading \$75 on an ORCA card or paying a \$75 fine. At the fifth interaction, Sound Transit has the option to refer to the civil courts for resolution.

Public Safety Update

- Ken Cummins, Director of Public Safety

Sound Transit staff began by providing an overview of what was presented last year, where he reported the public safety challenges were significant. Staff said that the current situation is suboptimal and it's not getting better. There are issues with hiring and retaining security staff and the ongoing opioid epidemic continues to affect public safety. Staff then started with a presentation about what they are doing to address the issues they are facing. The 2023-2027 Public Safety and Security Strategic Guidance document is the primary driver behind what they are doing, and it is in alignment with Sound Transit objectives. The guidance document's focus is to create a public safety community that includes Sound Transit staff, King County and Sound Transit police, contracted mental health providers, contracted security providers, and contracted local law enforcement. Sound Transit is trying to solve issues with a more comprehensive approach. The public safety mission is to enable transit service and access to transit by providing a safe, secure, comfortable and resilient environment. The vision is to expand the positive impacts of transit by improving passenger experience and enhancing public safety and security capabilities. They have six goals: Align and integrate public safety and security activities; develop an intelligent analysis and information sharing capability; develop and maintain a reservoir of capabilities; improve the effectiveness of public safety and security combined efforts; improve partnerships; and develop a diverse, well-trained, adaptable, and resilient workforce.

To achieve the vision staff said they need to employ diverse tools and methodologies, and practice routine excellence. The right tool is not always law enforcement; it can be ambassadors linking riders to resources they need. Routine excellence means becoming so good at a regimented delivery that when an unexpected event occurs, they are ready for it – being good at the basics of the work, fostering accountability, promoting a questioning attitude, resisting complacency, and prioritizing actions that have a direct impact on safety. Sound Transit is looking to create the strategic security officer model. The contracted security officers have to understand that they are the most important staff member because they are most likely to be in daily contact with passengers.

Currently, Sound Transit has staffing challenges; they have between 165 and 182 security officers, and they need 300 for full staffing. Some days they only have 50% of the security officers they need. On board security is supposed to be at 22 officers and they only have three. The security operations center also only has 10 of 18 positions filled. To address this, the Sound Transit Board has approved contracts with four security vendors. All of these firms can do all or part of the work so Sound Transit has flexibility to reduce or increase work assignments as needed. Work is assigned to them based on their stated preferences and their performance. The benefit of this approach is that it eliminates a single point

of failure, addresses gaps in training and expectations, increases supervision, and improves pay. Other improvements include: increasing mobile security patrols from 9 to 17; increasing on-board security; and increasing security operations center staff. They are currently in a transition period, which includes getting contracts signed, document review, training program approval, hiring/training/equipping, and phased transitions. Staff said they have learned a number of lessons, including activating field inspectors and hiring a security operation manager and six supervisors. Post-transition, Sound Transit will be bringing the contractors into the public safety community, increasing their visibility, and decreasing response times.

Discussion

Rider Experience Survey and Data Collection – A COP members asked if the survey was provided in different languages. Staff responded that it was translated into six languages. Another member asked why did Sound Transit survey in spring and then summer in 2022? Staff responded that they were planning to do three surveys in 2022, with the summer targeting tourists, but they did not get a good response so they decided to not do the fall survey. A COP member asked if the survey translators are culturally competent, or are they just translating verbatim? Staff said they use a contractor for translation but will need to follow up regarding how they translate. A member asked if there were any questions about perceptions of safety in relation to COVID and people being more sensitive to personal health and safety during the pandemic. Staff said that their hope is that the sample size is large enough to give a good representation of what passengers are thinking. A member asked what Sound Transit is doing differently to bring up sample size to improve representation. Staff said they are going to reach out to Community Based Organizations to see if they can achieve more diversity in respondents. A COP member asked about dependability, specifically on North Sounder, and how those numbers were derived since North Sounder has had dependability issues. Staff said that the survey was in the summer of 2022, when mudslides typically aren't an issue. He noted that there has also been a lot of work done to address the landslide issues. Another member asked about dependability and whether or not survey responses have been compared to actual data that Sound Transit collects on dependability. Staff indicated that's a difficult question because passengers dependability perceptions are not necessarily connected to what Sound Transit considers to be dependable. A member asked about how their survey compares to other agency surveys. Staff replied that some agencies don't do any surveys and others survey quite a bit; his sense is that Sound Transit is generally more survey-heavy than other agencies. A member asked if they are no longer going out and asking people face to face to complete surveys. Staff said that is correct; they are just handing out QR codes with access to the survey. The main issue is finding labor to conduct the survey. Another member asked if it would be possible to use the fare ambassadors to conduct survey? Staff said they can look into that but cautioned that the ambassadors already have a significant number of duties that will make that a challenge. A member was disappointed to see the low response rate of non-white riders. Sound Transit has experienced this low response rate for several years and it seems like they could have been more proactive to increase that response rate. Another member said that after reviewing the survey response dashboard it appears the survey responses are collected in a relatively small area and that it would be nice to see more even distribution of responses across the entire service area.

Fare Engagement Policy and Practices Update – A member asked about compliance with fare payment. Staff said they are trying to be more passenger-centric and to determine if the policy is effective. Staff said they have done well with putting passenger experience first but have not tested to see if the policy has been effective. Currently, about 45% of passengers do not pay. Ambassadors have experienced aggression towards them when they ask about fares. Another member asked about the services that are being offered by ambassadors; are people taking advantage of that? Sound Transit does not provide those services, but staff have heard from their partners that people are coming to them for services. Another member asked how the 45% non-payment rate compares to other agencies around the country. Staff noted

that differences in operations among agencies across the country makes it difficult to compare but said farebox recovery is at 16% and their goal is 40%. A lot of agencies are experiencing drops in fare box recovery. Non fare boardings have increased on all modes. A member asked about fare ambassador payment and how it is decided where to deploy them. Staff said that starting pay is \$24/hour, and they are classified as a temporary employee; they are looking into changing the ambassador position to a permanent position. It's an intricate process to determine where they are deployed. They try to ensure that they are deployed everywhere in the system in a random and equitable way. A member asked if there is a way to ladder the ambassador position to something else within the agency. Staff responded that part of retention issues is that some have moved into other positions within Sound Transit. There are also ambassador manager and supervisor roles that people can move into. A member asked if Sound Transit conducts exit interviews when ambassadors leave. Staff replied that some have left mid-shift without warning, but they do make an effort to get feedback about why staff decide to leave. The biggest issue right now is recruitment so positions can be filled faster. Fortunately, attrition has not been that high lately. A member noted that the 16% farebox recovery is substandard and that the situation needs to be addressed.

Public safety – A COP member asked if all light rail vehicles have cameras. Staff replied that they do but security does not have access to the cameras. Within the stations, the cameras are monitored in real time. A panel members asked about responsibility for security in parking garages. Staff said that if it is a Sound Transit garage, Sound Transit has responsibility. A member asked if officers who are at stations will be equipped with weapons. Staff responded that security officers are not armed. A COP member asked what the process for will be for helping people experiencing homelessness. Staff replied that security will have all the same access to partner resources that the King County Sheriff has. Their philosophy is to get people into a place where they can receive the help they need, not just to move them out of the station or the vehicle. The goal is to make sure they have all the tools they need to address all the different situations that arise. A member was surprised to hear about how challenging the safety and security issue are and is hopeful that it can get it turned around soon. Another member commented that it was positive that there is a woman owned security contractor and that there are some that are unionized.

Discussion, Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary, Member Reports

The meeting summary for the January 11 meeting was approved. Joe asked about the draft annual report and the schedule for finalizing and approving it. He suggested approving it at the March meeting. James suggested that it would be nice to have time to discuss it at the March retreat and to have it substantially done after that. Joe expressed that it is not a substantive issue that requires additional discussion. James said that he wants to make sure new members have opportunities to weigh in on areas of concern. He asked if there are members who have thoughts on the report review and approval process and schedule. Scott voiced support for moving forward with finalizing it at the March meeting. Tracy commented that having the information is the important part and she didn't see a need to hold it up. Charlotte agreed with Tracy. James asked COP members to raise their hand if they are okay moving forward with email review and approving the annual report at the March meeting. All COP members raised their hand.

James noted that the March meeting is going to be hybrid and encouraged members to attend. James also mentioned that the latest Federal Way Link flyover video is a great way to see the progress being made. Joe indicated that he will be remote at the March meeting.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, March 8, 2023, 5:30 – 8:15 PM

- Everett Link Extension
- Tacoma Dome Link Extension
- West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions