

## Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

**January 10, 2024**

**COP Members Present:** James Peyton, Paul Thompson, Tom Norcott, Scott Lampe, Lucas Simons, Gabriel Clark, Lorenzo Frazier, Donia Zaheri, Charlotte Murry, Diana Cambronero Venegas, Tina Pierce, Joe Scorcio

**COP Members Absent:**

**Others Present:** Kathy Albert, Adam Montee, Katie Flores, Chris Hoffman

### **Public Safety Office Update**

- Ken Cummins – Director of Public Safety

Staff began by introducing the presentation's agenda, which included the 5-year safety plan, challenges they are facing, and staffing. Staff first identified the public safety mission of Sound Transit. Sound Transit's vision is to be a leader in safe and secure transit by improving the experience of passengers and employees, expanding transit's positive impact on the region, and enhancing public safety and security capabilities. Staff then talked about public safety and security guidance. They look at this from a "one Sound Transit" approach. Staff then identified six goals for 2023-2027. They are aligning and integrating public safety and security activities, developing an intelligent analysis and information sharing capability, developing and maintaining a reservoir of capabilities, improving efficiency and effectiveness of combined efforts, improving partnerships, and developing a diverse, well-trained, adaptable, and resilient workforce. Progress is being made on all of these goals, some more quickly than others. A COP member asked about metrics related to safety and security that tie back to goals. Staff replied that they do have a lot of data and metrics that they use to assess progress. There are also specific metrics about response times, which will be covered in this presentation.

Staff talked about the highlights from 2023, covering accomplishments, special events, and preparedness. The biggest accomplishment was transitioning from a single security service provider to four providers, which happened over several months. They also had a 202% increase in security staff in 2023. They introduced a new unit that they call FAST, which operates 24 hours a day to respond to public concerns. It was up and running six months in advance of their schedule. The security operations center went to a hybrid model where contracted staff are overseen by Sound Transit staff at all times. They also opened up two new office spaces with the system. They get over 20,000 unique calls per month and there are over 5,000 cameras within the system. They are considering making it an all in-house staff office. Staffing still needs to increase by about 30% to get to full staffing. They are also launching two different awareness campaigns. With regards to special events, the Taylor Swift Concert was the largest event. Other significant events include the Beyonce concert, the baseball all-star game and University of Washington football home games. The Hilltop Link Extension and garage openings were supported by safety and security staff. For preparedness they had 9 tabletop events, which all require about six months of work to carry out. They had 3 months of emergency training as well.

Current challenges include service resistant unsheltered persons and unmet mental health needs, crime and the fear of crime, drug usage, and recruiting and retention. They are working to address these through partnerships with King County. From January to October Sound Transit made over 11,000 contacts with people who have unmet needs and 290 people took offers of shelters or programs. The program has been

extended through March 2024, because their data suggests that colder weather drives people into stations and onto trains. The problem is not specific to transit, but they are doing their best to be part of a regional solution. Crime and the fear of crime is a big topic. There was a 195% increase in assaults in 2023. Some of this is due to the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) changing the definition of assault to include verbal assault. They went from 122 verbal assaults in 2022 to 420 in 2023. Some factors in this include ridership increases and new extensions. A member asked if assaults were just against Sound Transit employees or across the entire system. Staff replied that it was across the entire system. A good majority of them are passenger on passenger. Another member asked if Sound Transit has conversations with other transit agencies about their experiences and practices. Staff said that they do and that these challenges are common among many agencies. Another member asked about the effect of fare gates on public safety. Staff said that New York has found that gates have limited effect on public safety. Another member asked about unmet needs challenges and what the total number of contacts were and the subsequent results. Staff said that 11,700 contacts were made and 290 people took the offer of service. With regards to drug use, staff mentioned that it is another regional problem and that it has an impact on Sound Transit as primary responders. Staff mentioned King County statistics for deaths related to fentanyl, highlighting a huge increase between 2022 and 2023. There were 15 deaths on Sound Transit system last year and at least 5 were drug deaths. There were 7,000 overdoses per month in King County. In 2023, medical aid calls were up 16% between 2022 and 2023. At least 54 of those were rectified through administering Narcan. With regards to recruiting and retention they have been doing well but there are generally more people retiring than new people coming on board. They are improving staffing levels, but staff levels are not where they need to be. Internally they are almost fully staffed. For law enforcement they are at 68 out of 91 positions filled. For contracted security they are up from 192 hours a week in 2022, to 546 in 2023.

Staff then responded to the previously supplied question about the Shake Alert system. They don't have one, but they have some experience shared by Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART). For floods and landslides, they are working with King and Pierce County officials on their hazards planning and responses. They also do weekly readiness training for personnel that respond to different events.

## **West Seattle and Ballard Link Extension Project Updates**

- Cathal Ridge – Executive Corridor Director
- Leda Chahim – Deputy Executive Director of Government and Community Relations

Staff began by providing brief updates on the status of both the West Seattle and Ballard Link extensions. With regards to West Seattle, staff described the project boundaries in SODO and at the Alaska Junction, with four stations over about four miles. They have a preferred alternative, and the timeline indicates that the project has been in planning phase for about 6 years. Design will take until 2027 and then construction from 2027 to 2032. The Board confirmed the preferred alternative on July 2022, and they plan to publish the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) in the second quarter of 2024. Some of the challenges include the construction market, city permitting, Pigeon Point, the Duwamish crossing, as well as a few issues in SODO. Property acquisition in SODO is a critical path item. Several public agencies own property there so it will be a complicated process. Acquiring BNSF railroad property is also a challenge, which can take a long time. There is also a large transmission line that has to be relocated before construction can begin. A member asked when acquisition will start. Staff responded that typically acquisition doesn't start until the environmental process is complete, but they have done early acquisition on other projects and would like to do that here. It does require FTA approval to do early acquisition. Typical acquisitions wouldn't start until they have environmental approval. Another member asked about tribal approval. Staff said that for the Duwamish crossing they have been looking at the columns and where they can be located to minimize impacts. They are modifying the design to ensure that satisfies Coast Guard requirements. They are looking at putting the columns on land, which would help address

tribal concerns with impacts to fisheries. There are also potential archaeological resources along the alignment that could affect tribal interests and they are working to develop plans for what they will do if they discover something. Staff also mentioned specific areas like Longfellow Creek and Pigeon Point, which are both sensitive environments.

The federal government will issue a Record of Decision (ROD) on the FEIS. With regards to permitting, all of their designs have to be reviewed and permitted by the City, which is a significant task. The construction market is a challenge as well because bid prices are very high and Sound Transit can't control them.

Staff then talked about public engagement activities. In October they held a station planning forum in West Seattle, conducted a survey, and held other events in SODO. They also held focus group discussions with underrepresented populations. They are planning on reporting back to the community sometime this spring. In general, the community has been very engaged. A member asked what reporting back will look like. Staff said they don't have a date yet but there will be some type of public forum.

For the Ballard extension, the preferred alternative took longer to identify, with one identified in March 2023 and then modified in July. It is still an ongoing process with potential modifications. They received a lot of feedback on the original Draft EIS (DEIS) and so they will be publishing another DEIS before they get to the FEIS. They expect the DEIS to come out later this year. In general, planning will continue until 2026, design will occur between 2026 and 2030, and construction between 2027 and 2039. It is a more complex project than West Seattle with tunneling downtown and a longer alignment. Challenges include federal approvals, city permitting, and the construction market. The downtown area has a lot of utilities and geotechnical issues that impact tunneling. A member asked about plans to avoid the risk of people getting hit by at grade trains. Staff said that the project is all in exclusive right of way so they will not have the issue of pedestrian/train interactions at grade. Another member asked about how elevated and tunnel compare with costs. Staff noted that the costs of tunneling and elevated guideway equalized in some areas due to increases in right of way costs.

With regards to engagement, staff said they have upcoming engagement planned in the Denny/South Lake Union area in April 2024. They will be doing this outreach to get input on a feasibility study of a potential additional alternative. In the Chinatown International District (CID) they will be doing monthly community information sessions. They will also be looking at public realm investments for south Downtown areas and will be holding workshops on a quarterly basis. They also will continue with community briefings throughout the corridor to provide project updates.

Staff mentioned the Denny to South Lake Union area and the continuing discussion of refining station locations. They could add another alternative to the mix in that area to refine station locations. They expect to complete the study in April and for the Board to consider taking action in May. Staff also talked about the CID and the plans for stations in the area. They noted concerns of the community and ways to minimize impacts. They conducted a further studies process to refine alternatives to look at shallow alternatives and shifting station locations to avoid direct impacts. New station ideas will be part of the second DEIS that is coming out this year. A member asked about the impacts of the North/South of CID alternatives to riders in other parts of Sound Transit's areas. Staff talked about the Link to Link transfer and how that will work with the North/South of CID alternatives. The transfer would be at a different station and that would increase travel times substantially, because those coming to or from the eastside to/from points south will first have to go farther north one additional stop to Pioneer Square to transfer to the southbound train. They are trying to optimize the transfer at Pioneer Square.

A member asked if they see any of the TAG report recommendations being applied to the project, specifically taking recommendations to the Board and being more transparent with their assessments.

Staff responded that in the past they have presented the information without identifying their opinions. A shift to offering opinions would represent a change in how the agency operates. Staff also indicated that doing additional studies and looking at additional alternatives takes time and will delay the project. They need to be clearer about schedule impacts when board members make requests for more studies and different alternatives. A member asked about the effect of the TAG recommendation regarding design and betterment standards. Staff indicated they were not aware of any changes to this policy and did not know what changes might take place there. A member asked about tribal relations on the Ballard Extension. Staff said that because Ballard is behind a bit they haven't drilled down to specific issues, such as tribal concerns. In addition, a tunnel under the Ship Canal doesn't have as many tribal issues as an elevated structure over the Duwamish. A member asked what will drive the selection of the preferred alternative. Staff noted the current preferred alternative but there are ongoing conversations in the Denny and CID areas.

### **Discussion, Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary, Member Reports, Annual Retreat, 2023 Annual Report**

Paul began by talking about the annual report and asked staff to discuss the process for its development. Staff said once it gets drafted it will be presented to the Board who will then identify a date to consider it. The administrator will develop a draft based on meeting summaries and last year's report. The administrator will develop a draft for COP review at least a week before the February meeting. The COP will review the draft and then discuss the draft at the February meeting. After that, it will be finalized and sent to the Board. A member commented that the format for last year's report is a good one to emulate, and recommended we stay with that approach. The December 13 meeting summary was approved. Paul then thanked Joe for his service on the COP and noted that this will be his last meeting. Joe thanked everyone for their support during his tenure on the COP. Another newer member thanked Joe for his guidance and support. Other members noted the insights and expertise Joe has provided over the years. For member reports, a member noted the positive conversations about taking advantage of station area development on the Federal Way Link Extension. Paul asked everyone to complete the doodle poll for the retreat by the end of the week. Paul asked the COP to send any questions for next month's presenters to the administrator.

**Next Meeting:** Wednesday, February 14, 2024, 5:30 – 8:15 PM

- Long Term Vehicle Storage Solution Shortage Follow-up
- Starter 2 Line Preparation Update
- Passenger Information Management System Progress
- Discussion of the draft annual report