

## Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

**May 10, 2023**

**COP Members Present:** James Peyton, Joe Scorcio, Paul Thompson, Carston Curd, Charlotte Murry, Lucas Simons, Tom Norcott, Tina Pierce, Helen Powell, Lorenzo Frazier, Gabriel Clark

**COP Members Absent:** Diana Cambronero Venegas, Scott Lampe

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

### **Staff Response to TAG Report**

- Moises Gutierrez – Chief Systems Quality Officer
- Brooke Belman – Deputy CEO

Sound Transit staff began by providing some context, talking about the realignment resolution in 2021. The Board requested the formation of the TAG and the hiring of an independent consultant. The TAG is composed of 8 individuals to look at how Sound Transit can expedite its capital program. The TAG reports directly to the Board. They came together in the summer of 2022, and presented their recommendations in March 2023. Staff prepared their response to the TAG report in April 2023. The Board passed a resolution directing staff to follow through on the TAG's recommendations. Staff said that this presentation is the same one they presented to the Board. They said they will address all six of the TAG's recommendations as well as some potential actions. Staff acknowledged they are facing a number of challenges with constructing the capital program. CEO Timm has already directed staff to take several actions as a result of the TAG report.

Staff addressed the first recommendation, which is to rebuild trust and clarify roles and responsibilities of the Board and staff. Staff identified the actions already underway, which include incorporating suggestions from the independent consultant and introducing a performance tracker. The Board also identified some other actions for discussion. These include keeping both the independent consultant and the TAG in an active role and streamlining the number of items that are presented to the Board for action. The second recommendation was to introduce an experienced megaproject capital program executive. Staff are trying to determine how to act on this recommendation while complementing existing staff. Sound Transit is also looking at their organizational chart to make changes that split the Chief Systems Officer into three positions. This structure ensures that functions are not buried within the organization. CEO Timm presented the new structure to the Board and focused on how they can better elevate issues and challenges. Specific actions under this recommendation included reviewing the capital program to identify gaps and opportunities in staffing and structure where new capacity will complement existing expertise. They are also developing a program-wide approach to delivering their complex megaprojects. They are also looking at ways to leverage consultant experience.

The third recommendation was to implement procedures that push decision-making down to the lowest level practical and foster an environment that encourages decision-making in general. The actions underway include pushing decision-making to the appropriate level and providing clarification about when decisions should be elevated. The fourth recommendation is to align key procedures with industry best practices, eliminating unnecessary steps and associated delays. Sound Transit is already working on becoming a "owner of choice" and improving relationships and processes with consultants and contractors. They will also create a forum for the industry to meet directly with the CEO. The fifth recommendation is to strengthen and enforce an agency betterment policy. They are working on updating the System Expansion Implementation Plan, which covers permitting and when to elevate issues to the

Board. The sixth recommendation is to engage the FTA as a delivery partner equally invested in delivering transit to the region. Staff then talked about next steps, which include committing to improve trust, transparency, and accountability and providing quarterly updates to the Board. The Board is considering a number of potential next steps, including developing policies and practices to manage Board requests for information from staff and reviewing and updating current delegation of authority levels between the Board and staff.

### **Panel Discussion on 2023-2024 Topics of Interest**

The COP chair initiated a discussion on topics of interest and noted the results of the survey and the average scores for each topic. He said that small groups will be used to respond to the proposal to adopt the top 8 topics as the focus areas for the remainder of the year.

#### *The online group*

They said they appreciated the process and said that it may be a good idea to do this more than once a year in case our focus changes.

#### *The in-person group*

One member questioned if rider experience was really a topic for the COP to consider since there is a rider experience committee. The group confirmed that these are topics they want presenters to include in their presentations. Another member said that all the topics are important and that they want to make sure the people with the right expertise are presenting. He also said that it's important that the presenters have new information to present to the COP. The COP needs to have a process to communicate to presenters well in advance what they should be prepared to present. It's important that the COP doesn't just schedule these topics based on their ranking. It should be based on schedule and need.

The chair said that he and the vice chair would work with the COP Administrator to take the topics and rearrange them into a more user-friendly list. He asked for a vote to approve these topics as their list for the remainder of the year. The vote passed with one no vote and two abstentions.

### **Update on 2023 COP Tour of East Link Extension**

- Kathy Albert – Chief Strategic Business Officer

Sound Transit staff said that the COP will participate in a tour of the East Link Extension. Staff said they will need to have a firm head count, so they know how much PPE to provide and the right size bus to schedule. The tour will begin at 9 a.m. at Union Station. There will be safety briefing, PPE will be provided, and then the COP will board a bus. There will be tour of the Bellevue Station and the I-90 bridge; the tour will then follow Bellevue alignment and then end at Redmond extension. The bus will then get on SR 520 to head back to Seattle, with the plan to return to Union Station around noon. Staff said that members will need to wear close-toed shoes, preferably boots. Staff said that there will be a more detailed description and an invitation to RSVP to. The Project Director will be leading the tour.

### **Panel Discussion to Identify Questions for Next Month's Meeting**

The chair led the COP in a discussion about what questions the panel would like to have answered by the presenters at next month's meeting. One member suggested that the COP start with the list of questions previously completed for Julie Timm. Staff indicated that the list of questions previously developed will be distributed to the COP. The COP was divided into an in-person and an online group, and each group developed a list of questions and topics.

#### *In-person group*

What is the CEO directing staff to do to get the data she needs for asset management?  
How does Sound Transit decide what percentage goes to each subarea for maintenance?  
Public perception and trust  
Project costs and how they are used for planning upcoming projects  
Transparency about the costs of the consultants (independent consultant and TAG) and return on investment for using them  
Lessons learned about estimating costs for projects and why they are always low

#### *Online group*

How is Julie going to make decision faster and empower staff?  
How goals have been met and whether they have aligned with what she was given on March 31?

The chair asked if this discussion was useful to identify topics and questions ahead of the upcoming meeting. There was agreement that for the most part that coming up with questions ahead of time was useful.

#### **Discussion**

Staff Response to TAG Report – A COP member asked about problems during construction that were discovered later than desired and asked if design-build contracts give enough visibility into projects to identify problems early. Staff acknowledged that they can improve in this area and they are awaiting recommendations from an outside group on how they can improve. They are also reviewing inspection practices, which include having independent inspectors on site. They are stressing the importance of quality with all their staff and related functions of oversight and communications. They are streamlining the process to elevate issues. Another member asked about the acronym WSBLE. Staff responded that is the West Seattle Ballard Link Extension Project. Staff said PSO is Portfolio Services Office, ACEC is American Council of Engineering Companies, AGC is Association of General Contractors, and FTA is Federal Transit Administration. Another member asked about why the TAG was formed and staff responded it was all about streamlining. That member asked how they reconcile the desire to streamline and focus on quality. Staff said that quality is part of maintaining trust of the Board and goes hand in hand with streamlining. A member asked what drove the report, and whether it was a cultural issue within the agency. Staff responded that trust with the Board is critical, and that communicating risk needs to be very clear and concise to maintain that trust. Staff said they have challenges with delivering a huge program and that culture and streamlining processes are equally important.

A member asked about the progress performance tracker and whether it's internal or public. Staff said that it is public and that it is already available on the website. They try to make it very clear with their metrics and make it easy to digest and read. The tracker pulls data from all the consultants and contractors. There are qualitative notes that help provide context. A member asked if the TAG is intended to address delays associated with "Seattle Process" that includes requests for new alternatives to be created and analyzed. That member went on to ask if it is really reasonable to expect that projects can be accelerated. Staff said that schedules need to be more clearly explained, including what it means if actions or postponements are taken or not taken. They are looking at ways to tighten their processes and get creative when they face scheduling challenges. Another member asked about recommendation three and gave an example of negotiating an agreement and the number of people needed to review the agreement. He said it's important to make sure that people with authority can negotiate and review documents. He encouraged Sound Transit to get the right people in the room when negotiating decisions. Another member asked about continuous improvement and how it is measured and if the project progress report is intended to provide that measurement. Staff talked about invoicing and the time it takes to process them. They are measuring their improvements against a baseline. Staff also talked about how they can become an "owner of choice" and what that means. They are coming up with a definition of that and sharing it

with their partners. A member asked staff to describe how Board meetings will change after these recommendations are implemented. Staff responded that they plan for them to focus on bigger action items, changing the content to make sure it's clear, being more concise with how they communicate risk, and moving towards providing staff recommendations for the Board to consider. A member asked about criteria for making recommendations. Staff said that they have to fall back on criteria when making recommendations and that process is an ongoing conversation. They are trying to move towards having the Board weigh in at a more programmatic level. Another member complimented the staff's commitment to transparency and trust and asked about the independent oversight consultant and what their scope is going forward. Staff said that is an ongoing conversation with the Board to determine the level of involvement of both the independent consultant and the TAG. One of the tasks they asked the independent consultant to look at was how they could improve their reporting. A member asked how they balance trust with maintaining public support. Staff said they value trust, and they are aware they need to be thoughtful about how they talk about the projects in a clear and accurate way. They want to be on target with how they use people's time, to ensure they get to the point without going into too much detail.

A COP member commented that the presentation was in a good format and thought it allowed for discussion and wasn't too much information to digest. Other members agreed it was a good conversation with enough time for questions. A member said the project tracker information is pretty technical and that it needs to be worked on to make it easier to digest. Another member said that there was going to be a lot that will be up to the Board. The COP said that 6 months seems like a reasonable time for an update on this topic. Two members noted that the staff do very often defer to the Board on a great many issues, even in today's discussions, and were concerned about the difficulty of changing the staff culture to feel more confident making some of these decisions internally. There needs to be more consideration about what decisions can be made at the staff level.

### **Discussion, Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary, Member Reports**

The meeting summaries for the April 12 meeting and the March 29 annual retreat were approved. The Chair reminded the COP that there are members of the public attending the meetings and observing the online group when the COP breaks into small group discussions. A COP member said that the last light rail train at night stops at SODO and wanted to know why that is as it seems like a bad location. Staff said that the downtown tunnel is closed that late at night and the trains have to return to the SODO maintenance base. Another member said the light rail felt safe and clean the last time he was on it. Another member said a 60% design public meeting was held for the SR 522 BRT project and it was well attended and people were excited about the project. Staff reminded the panel that the Mariners will be playing on the night of the next meeting and to plan accordingly for parking.

**Next Meeting:** Wednesday, June 14, 2023, 5:30 – 8:15 PM

- CEO Timm
- Subarea Equity and Review of 2022 Schedule of Sources and Uses of Funds by Subarea Report