

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Each year, Sound Transit prepares an update on the development of its express bus, commuter rail and light rail services. The 2011 Service Implementation Plan, or SIP, describes service changes planned for 2011, together with preliminary service proposals and financial projections for 2012 through 2016. It also includes a detailed report on the status of each bus and rail route and performance objectives for the coming year, including ridership and productivity targets.

With the continued economic recession, tax revenues needed to implement Sound Transit's planned ST2 projects and services have fallen below projections. Forecasts conducted during Fall 2009 showed that projected revenues through 2023 were about 20 percent below projected costs of the program. More recent forecasts show that the shortfall has increased to 25 percent. While there are signs that the economy is beginning to recover, to date this has not resulted in a turnaround of negative revenue trends. Also, while total Sound Transit ridership continues to increase, recent growth rates have been below expectations. Clearly, the recession has affected growth in transportation demand and particularly journey-to-work commuter travel.

As a result, each transit service in Sound Transit's 2011 budget has undergone a thorough review for opportunities to reduce operating costs. The 2011 Service Implementation Plan responded to the challenge with several proposals for Board consideration, including deferring some ST2 bus service expansion and reducing the least productive ST Express services. These changes, together with schedule efficiencies that are being implemented administratively, will reduce bus operating costs by almost \$7.5 million during the first full year following implementation. While no reductions are currently proposed for Sound Transit's rail services, potential future service deferrals, operating efficiencies and other cost-saving measures are being evaluated for Link and Sounder, and are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 of the SIP.

ST Express Bus

ST Express currently represents Sound Transit's predominant service mode with about 56 percent of all passenger boardings and 52 percent of total operating and maintenance costs. The service is funded by four of Sound Transit's five equity subareas. Significant reductions in bus operating costs would help address the total ST2 program shortfall. While still increasing, ridership growth on ST Express has slowed considerably during the past two years. Between 2007 and 2008, bus ridership increased 17 percent; 2009 ridership was 3 percent higher than 2008, and ridership for the first half of 2010 was up 2 percent. Also, recent growth has not been uniform across the system, with some routes continuing to show consistent ridership increases while others have declined. This contrasts vividly with 2008, when ridership grew significantly on all but a few routes.

Savings from More Efficient Scheduling

During the past year, the expanded deployment of automatic passenger counters and more sophisticated scheduling software has allowed staff to evaluate bus schedules and ridership at a higher level of detail than before. Working closely with schedule planners at the partner transit agencies, Sound Transit staff identified schedule efficiencies and minor trip cuts that are being implemented to reduce costs. Schedule efficiency actions include reductions in scheduled running times, adjusting layover times at terminals, interlining routes with one another to reduce platform time and re-blocking driver runs to reduce out-of-service "deadhead" miles. The first phase of this initiative was implemented in June 2010, and the second phase began with the October 2010

service change. Further efficiencies are being planned for 2011. Schedule efficiencies are expected to save just under \$1.2 million during the first full year following implementation.

Savings from Lower Cost Service Providers

Sound Transit contracts with Community Transit, King County Metro and Pierce Transit to operate ST Express service. Each partner agency is assigned to operate a specific group of routes. While all three provide high-quality service, the rates charged by each agency are not uniform. To achieve additional cost savings, the operation of Routes 566 and 577 will be shifted from King County Metro to Pierce Transit in February 2011. This change, which will save approximately \$1.0 million annually, was approved by the Operations and Administration Committee of the Sound Transit Board on November 18, 2010.

ST2 Service Deferrals

Based on an analysis of the most recent ridership data and the seat capacity available on existing services, Sound Transit staff identified three routes where ST2-funded service enhancements could be deferred: Planned peak period service increases on **Route 513 Everett-Seattle** and **Route 554 Issaquah-Seattle**, and the extension of **Route 566 Auburn-Overlake** from Overlake Transit Center to downtown Redmond. These improvements were previously approved by the Board as part of the 2010 SIP, but under the 2011 SIP they will be deferred. Current ridership data shows that the improvements planned for these routes are not needed at this time. Annual operating cost savings from deferring these improvements total about \$2.8 million. Other ST2 enhancements will be implemented as originally planned, including peak period service increases on Routes 511 Lynnwood-Seattle, Route 522 Woodinville-Seattle and Route 532 Everett-Bellevue.

Reductions to Existing Service (Revised)

Using guidelines from the Board-approved Sound Transit Service Standards and Performance Measures, staff identified routes with low productivity and developed specific proposals to reduce service levels or restructure service to achieve operating savings. These initial proposals were described in the Draft SIP that was released Oct. 8, 2010. Following public feedback and further collaboration with King County Metro, the original proposals for Routes 540 and 554 were revised and a proposal to reduce service on Route 545 was dropped. The Final SIP includes these ST Express service reductions which will be implemented in June 2011:

- **Route 510 Seattle-Everett:** This route will be combined with Route 511 Lynnwood-Seattle on Sundays and holidays to reduce costs. The combined route will be designated Route 512.
- **Route 513 Seattle-Everett via Eastmont:** The route segment between downtown Everett and Evergreen Way/79th Place SE will be deleted.
- **Route 535 Lynnwood-Bellevue:** Sunday and holiday service will be deleted on this route.
- **Route 540 Kirkland-University District:** Midday and evening service will be deleted, and the University District routing will be revised to loop through the UW campus via 15th Avenue NE, NE 45th Street, Memorial Way, Stevens Way and Grant Lane.
- **Route 554 Issaquah-Seattle:** Midday service will be reduced from every 15 minutes to every 20 minutes, and weekend service will be reduced from every 30 minutes to every 60 minutes before 10:00 a.m. and after 7:00 p.m.
- **Route 560 Bellevue-West Seattle:** The route segment between West Seattle and Burien will be discontinued except during weekday peak periods.
- **Route 599 Lakewood-Tacoma:** This route will be deleted.

Annual cost savings from implementing these service reductions are just under \$3.5 million. The total savings from schedule efficiencies, lower-cost service providers, proposed service deferrals and service reductions are approximately \$7.5 million annually after allowing for reduced fare revenue (for the 2011 budget year, the savings will be less because most of the service changes would start in June). All service changes approved by the Operations & Administration Committee of the Sound Transit Board are listed in Chapter 1. A detailed ST Express route-by-route performance analysis is in Chapter 2.

Central Link Light Rail

Central Link passenger operations began on July 18, 2009 between Westlake Station and Tukwila International Boulevard Station. Service extended southward 1.7 miles to the SeaTac/Airport Station on Dec. 18, 2009. Ridership has increased from 432,272 passenger boardings in August 2009, the first full calendar month of operation, to 694,336 boardings in August 2010, an increase of over 60 percent.

The Central Link startup represents a dramatic increase in transit capacity along the corridor. Service operates seven days a week between 5 a.m. and 1 a.m. (6 a.m. to midnight on Sundays). Two-car trains operate every 7 to 10 minutes most of the day, with 15-minute service provided early in the morning and late at night. During the first six months, ridership growth was modest but a strong upward trend began with the airport extension in December and the startup of the second phase of bus service connections in February 2010. The SeaTac/Airport station quickly became the busiest station on the line outside of downtown Seattle. Weekend ridership has been unexpectedly strong, with the number of boardings on an average weekend day representing about 67 percent of the average weekday boardings. The high weekend use indicates that Central Link has attracted customers who use the service for a variety of transportation purposes including shopping and recreation as well as commuting to work.

In October 2010, King County Metro significantly increased connecting bus service to Central Link with the startup of bus rapid transit along the SR 99 south corridor. “Rapid Ride” Line A service between Federal Way Transit Center and Tukwila International Boulevard Station operates every 15 minutes from approximately 4 a.m. until 10 p.m. every day of the week, with 10-minute service during weekday peak periods. Service operates approximately every 30 minutes after 10 p.m.

As with other new transit modes, the initial two years of Central Link operation are a period of customer trial and acceptance. Ridership during this period tends to be volatile, and generally has a steeper growth curve than more mature services. Sound Transit’s “Service Standards and Performance Measures” recommends that new services operate a minimum of two years before implementing major changes in service levels.

At this time, no changes to service are proposed. However, operating experience has shown that night and weekend ridership levels do not require two-car trains. Beginning Oct. 2, 2010, one-car trains operate after about 8 p.m. and all day Saturdays and Sundays. Two-car trains continue to operate on evenings and weekend days when major events are scheduled, such as Seahawk football games and the annual Torchlight Parade. This change will result in energy and vehicle maintenance staff cost savings and will reduce unnecessary wear and tear on the light rail vehicles.

A detailed evaluation of Central Link’s first year performance is in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 describes preliminary plans for service to South 200th Street and the University of Washington, expected to open later in the decade.

Sounder Commuter Rail

Sounder, with its large proportion of journey-to-work commuters, has been particularly impacted by the economic recession. First Quarter 2010 boardings were down by 6 percent compared with the same period in 2009, but the Second Quarter of 2010 has seen a slight increase in boardings. Staff projects that Sounder ridership will stabilize during 2011 and begin to increase significantly with the startup of service to Lakewood in late 2012. In the meantime, the South Line received additional parking capacity with the opening of the new “Red Lot” near Puyallup Station in October 2010, and long-awaited improvements to parking and bus facilities are currently under construction at the Edmonds Station on the North Line.

No changes to Sounder service levels are proposed for 2011. Chapter 3 outlines plans for the Tacoma-to-Lakewood extension and preliminary plans for ST2-funded service expansion on the South Line during the 2013-2016 timeframe.

Tacoma Link

Tacoma Link ridership declined 8 percent during the first half of 2010 compared with the same period a year earlier. A combination of factors, including fewer special events at the Tacoma Dome and the Tacoma Convention Center, reduced retail activity and less employment in downtown Tacoma contributed towards the decline. Operationally Tacoma Link is virtually unchanged from 2009. Characterized by frequent, highly dependable service, Tacoma Link easily met all of its Second Quarter 2010 service quality scorecard measures for on-time performance, service availability and low rates of customer complaints.

Two key decisions will greatly influence Tacoma Link during 2011. Since service started in 2003, no fare has been charged to ride Tacoma Link trains. This policy was adopted by the Sound Transit Board at that time because it was believed that the cost of collecting fares would exceed the revenue generated. Recent experience with the actual costs of acquiring and maintaining fare collection equipment elsewhere on the Sound Transit system suggests that projected fare revenue could cover fare collection expenses and contribute towards other operating costs. Security staff are already on board most trains and could serve as fare enforcement officers. Passenger surveys indicate that a large proportion of Tacoma Link customers already carry ORCA cards or other transit fare media, which may minimize the ridership loss if fares are charged. The Sound Transit Board, in a separate action, will decide whether to charge fares on Tacoma Link beginning in 2011.

A second major Board decision will provide direction on a proposed new Tacoma Link station. Located halfway between the existing Theater District and Convention Center stations, the new station would be funded by the City of Tacoma and would expand access to Link in the vicinity of 11th and Commerce in the downtown area. A trade off is that the station would result in less frequent service, because the increased dwell time and signal delay would require reducing train frequency from every 10 minutes to every 12 minutes weekdays and Saturdays, and from every 20 minutes to every 24 minutes evenings and Sundays. The Sound Transit Board will decide whether to proceed with the 11th Street station in early 2011. For planning purposes, the SIP assumes that the station will be constructed and opened for service in June 2011.

Preliminary Service Plans for 2012 - 2016

Chapter 3 of the SIP describes preliminary 2012-2016 service plans. These “out year” plans were updated based on the most recent staff work on service reductions and efficiencies and revised capital project schedules. Service levels, ridership and fare revenue estimates shown for 2012-2016 are used to develop the agency’s Long-Range Financial Plan; however, the actual implementation of service changes is still subject to Board approval of the annual SIP.

Note: The service proposals shown below are preliminary. Sound Transit’s three largest partner agencies- Community Transit, King County Metro and Pierce Transit- are planning major bus service revisions in 2012 that may result in additional ST Express service changes not foreseen at this time.

2012

- Sounder South Line extended from Tacoma to South Tacoma and Lakewood.
- Temporary bus Route 593 discontinued with extension of Sounder service to South Tacoma; trips converted to Route 590 service between Seattle and Tacoma Dome only.

2013

- Potential restructure of Route 560 in conjunction with startup of Metro Rapid Ride Line F (Renton-Burien).
- One additional Sounder round trip added between Lakewood and Seattle.

2014

- Potential restructure of Route 540 in conjunction with opening of HOV direct access ramps at SR 520/108th Avenue NE.

2016

- Two additional round trips added on the Sounder South Line.
- Central Link extended to South 200th, Capitol Hill and the University of Washington.
- ST Express Route 586 (Tacoma-U District) discontinued with opening of U Link.

Additional details are included in Chapter 3.

Title VI

In compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the 2011 Service Implementation Plan includes an impact assessment of the 2011 service changes on minority transit users and communities, low-income populations, and persons with a limited ability to speak, understand, read and write English. The Title VI assessment is located in Appendix D.

Accessible Services

With the start up of Central Link service, Sound Transit has an ADA paratransit obligation under provisions of federal regulations. This service, operated for Sound Transit under contract with King County Metro, provides transportation for eligible persons with disabilities within ¾-mile of the Central Link alignment. The 2011 SIP includes operating results for the first full year of Central Link paratransit service. Projected paratransit operating and maintenance costs are shown in Appendix A-7. Annual trips are estimated to be 69,000.

Sound Transit will continue to plan and implement actions and programs under *United We Ride in Puget Sound*, the Regional Special Needs Transportation Plan. The complete plan is available at: <http://www.soundtransit.org/x1873.xml> or by e-mailing accessibility@soundtransit.org .

Sound Transit will continue to provide funding for the special needs transportation coordinating coalitions in King, Pierce and Snohomish Counties. The agency will also provide partial funding for a legislatively mandated special needs project in Pierce County.

Quick Guide to the 2011 SIP:

Chapter 1 summarizes the 2011 service changes and deferrals approved by the Operations and Administration Committee of the Sound Transit Board.

Chapter 2 includes a description and performance summary of Sounder, Link and each ST Express route, with background information on each proposed 2011 SIP service change.

Chapter 3 describes preliminary plans for 2012-2016.

Chapter 4 includes estimates of ridership and fare revenue for all three transit modes through 2016, and a description of the modeling and assumptions used to develop the estimates.