



Summary Minutes

Rider Experience and Operations Committee Meeting March 2, 2023

Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 1:30 p.m. by Chair Walker.

The meeting was available in person and streamed on:

<https://soundtransit.webex.com/soundtransit/j.php?MTID=m0491a2ab30f2965c6c01f98e32cc2bfe>

Roll call of members

Chair	Vice Chair
(P) Kristina Walker, Tacoma Deputy Mayor	(P) Ed Prince, Renton Councilmember

Board Members	
(P) David Baker, Kenmore Councilmember	(P) Kim Roscoe, Fife Mayor
(P) Christine Frizzell, Lynnwood Mayor	(A) Dave Upthegrove, King County Council Chair
(P) Debora Juarez, Seattle Council President	(A) Peter von Reichbauer, King County Councilmember

Josephine Gamboa, Board Relations Specialist, announced that a quorum of the committee was present at roll call.

Report of the Chair

Monthly Contract Report

The monthly contract report was included in members meeting packets for review.

CEO Report

CEO Julie Timm provided the CEO Report.

TAG presentation and Executive Team Acting Directors announcement

CEO Timm acknowledged the report from the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) at this morning's Executive Committee meeting that provided implementation strategies to prepare for the significant growth in construction, operations, and service in the next couple of years. Those items would be addressed at an April 2023 meeting. CEO Timm announced a structural change to increase transparency, accountability, and trust in the organization. CEO Timm introduced John Henry, the agency's new Chief Financial Officer. The agency also created a separate division with a Deputy CEO of Service Delivery position. This role would oversee Operations and Passenger Experience functions. Russ Arnold, Chief Passenger Experience and Innovation Officer, was appointed to the acting position of Deputy CEO Service Delivery Officer. Marie Olsen was appointed acting Chief Passenger Experience and Innovation Officer in the meantime.

Drug Use and Disruptive Conduct on ST Vehicles and Platforms

With the challenges of COVID, labor shortages, and the associated social impacts of current economic conditions, both real, as well as perceived, level of safety and security on the system had not lived up to the agency's value and commitments. This was seen and felt by the decreased security presence on the system and the increased presence of drug use and unsanitary conditions on trains, buses, and platforms.

Sound Transit was actively implementing several programs to address and reverse the disturbing trend. In February 2023, the Board approved contracts with four new security vendors to correct an ongoing challenge of too few available officers on the system. These contracts would address low staffing levels and improve overall officer training and system-wide supervisory support.

Transitioning between the agency's current vendors and these new firms was currently underway, and the agency's operators and riders should expect to see more security presence on the trains in the coming months. The first phase of the transition, set for mid-March 2023, was an increase to the onboard security teams. The agency's current officers had already started to conduct targeted enforcement activities of removing people from trains and stations throughout the system when they are seen violating the state code on Unlawful Transit Conduct.

Security levels were going to increase, but that wouldn't mean there would be officers on every car and every platform every day. CEO Timm educated the public on how to contact security. The agency planned to initiate a communications campaign to promote increased use of the security contact number by riders, as real-time reports would increase ability to be responsive to immediate needs.

The agency was also implementing a pilot to add station attendants at Westlake and Northgate stations. This would put staff on site to support riders on the system and to report security and sanitation concerns for immediate assistance. If it sees success, the agency would look to expand this to other key stations on the system. The agency was also working to have fare payment areas pushed outside of platforms, especially in tunnels, to allow fare ambassadors and security support validate fare payment more directly on paid-fare zone platforms prior to riders boarding a train. If successful, this would give more visibility for staff to actively support riders in crisis and to discourage or report unlawful conduct to reduce incidents on our vehicles.

The agency planned to increase the cleaning of its stations and trains. Staffing levels for these efforts were also posing challenges to meet expectations. The team was working with King County Metro to identify and remove barriers to hiring and increasing staff support in the area. The agency started train cleanings at Northgate, but that was currently only occurring in the midday period. Weekly power washing of stairs was targeted as a high priority since these areas had been identified as having higher frequencies of sanitation concerns. Regarding elevators and escalators, the agency's labor team, procurement team, and operations team were developing strategies to bring on added resources to increase the speed at which issues could be identified and these facilities could return to service when they malfunction or were otherwise damaged. The agency's passenger experience team had been tasked to increase wayfinding points at every station so that when elevators and escalators were down, people can more readily be self-directed through the system.

Finally, the agency continued to work with its partners to look for avenues of support, housing, and recovery for any riders and neighbors in crisis. These concerns were not isolated to Sound Transit, and support is required from all partners to be successful.

Chair Walker acknowledged the receipt of public comments regarding these issues and noted the Committee understands the work ahead to address the concerns.

Public comment

Chair Walker announced that public comment would be accepted via email to emailtheboard@soundtransit.org, in person, and would also be accepted virtually.

The following people provided written comments:

Stephen Fesler
Julia Hobbs

There were no comment submissions for in-person and virtual public comment.

Business Items

For Committee final action

February 2, 2023, Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting minutes

It was moved by Boardmember Baker, seconded by Committee Vice Chair Prince and carried by unanimous consent that the minutes of the February 2, 2023 Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting be approved as presented.

Motion No. M2023-17: Authorizing the chief executive officer to increase the contract contingency for the Western Venture Construction, Inc. contract for construction of the Operations and Maintenance Facility Central Link Control Center heating, ventilation, and air conditioning replacement in the amount of \$1,088,435 for a new total authorized contract amount not to exceed \$4,288,435, plus applicable taxes.

Tom McDonald, Deputy Director of Operations Projects, and Programs, provided the staff report.

Motion No. M2023-17 was moved by Committee Vice Chair Prince and seconded by Boardmember Baker.

Chair Walker wanted to confirm the increase was within budget and had no impacts to other projects. Mr. McDonald confirmed.

Chair Walker called for a roll call vote.

Ayes

David Baker
Christine Frizzell
Debora Juarez
Ed Prince
Kim Roscoe
Kristina Walker

Nays

It was carried by unanimous vote of six committee members present that Motion No. M2023-17 be approved as presented.

Reports to the Committee

REO Metrics Performance Report

Raj Cheriell, Director of Essential Data and Analytics, provided the report. He reviewed the continuous improvement and target setting process that included creating the Passenger Experience Vision, aligning metrics to the vision, and defining success with targets. Mr. Cheriell explained the process of target setting.

The elevators and escalators target origin was based on peer agencies and with an understanding of repair and maintenance time. The target was 97 percent availability for elevators and 95 percent for escalators. LINK escalators and non-revenue elevators were at target.

Boardmember Juarez noted the metrics for the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel (DSTT) escalators and elevators were showcased in the presentation and asked if other conveyances would be reviewed. Mr. Cheriell responded that the dashboard could be accessed to look deeper into other stations; this presentation provided highlights on the summary of metrics. Boardmember Juarez asked if Board members had to look into other specific stations themselves for their constituents to review the data they're interested in. Mr. Cheriell explained the dashboard was available on the Sound Transit website for the public. Boardmember Juarez asked if the presentation would be available to post onto social media so the public was aware of where to find the data. Chair Walker confirmed the presentation would be available. Suraj Shetty, Executive Director of Operations, explained that the dashboard was developed in a way to show Link and non-Link facilities. Once the DSTT was inherited, it was shown as separate metrics. Mr. Shetty noted a link to the dashboard and presentation would be posted on the social media platforms and staff could work on compiling a report that could be posted as well. Russ Arnold, Acting Deputy CEO Service Delivery Officer, noted the social media team would post alerts on Twitter and also post ADA alerts that were available for passengers to sign-up for.

Chair Walker thanked staff for shifting these presentations to include highlights of information rather than providing every metric that could ultimately be an overwhelming amount of information.

Mr. Cheriell reviewed the safety metric which was of Federal requirement and was leeway for past performance issues and resources. The target was 5 percent reduction against a three-year rolling average for ST Express and a 0.5 percent reduction for Light Rail.

On Time Performance targets were adopted into the 2018 Service Standards and were based on peer comparison. The targets for Link was 90 percent within two minutes of headway, ST Express was 85 percent within five minutes of schedule, and Sounder was 95 percent within seven minutes at arrival in terminal. The Trip Delivery metric was also adopted into the 2018 Service Standards and was based on peer comparison. The targets for Link was 98.5 percent of scheduled trips were operated. For Tacoma Link, 98.5 percent of trips were operated. For ST Express, 99.8 percent of trips were operated. For Sounder, 99.5 percent of trips were operated.

Mr. Cheriell shared with the committee what next steps were taken when certain metrics weren't hitting their targets. He used the Northgate escalators as an example and explained further analysis was taken to find the root cause. Other remedies included policy based efforts, technological responses, operational changes, and enhanced communication were a few.

Next steps included continuing to set targets on metrics that didn't have them, updating existing metrics, developing more granular targets. Staff would return to the Committee to share new targets, describe performance against targets, and talk about steps taken to reach targets.

Boardmember Roscoe thanked staff for the presentation and providing information on what's available to riders in real time.

Chair Walker asked about the timeline of target presentations. Mr. Cheriell replied there was no definite timeline but would return in April for a routine report and would have more information at that meeting on when new targets would be available.

Future Ready Update – Link Enhancement and State of Good Repair Work

Suraj Shetty, Executive Director of Operations, provided the presentation. A significant amount of work was completed in 2022, including platform renovation at Columbia City station, overhead catenary wire replacement near Tukwila international Blvd station, and the overhead catenary system sectioning projects that were done in the DSTT. Staff committed to providing updates as they became available for

upcoming projects. Exact dates or the service impact for these projects were yet to be determined but as projects were clarified, staff would inform the committee and the public. Mr. Shetty clarified that there were three types of service disruptions: there's the type that's unplanned that we have to address immediately, like the service interruption that was recently experienced when the emergency fans in the Pioneer Square Street Station tunnel didn't work, another type was regular maintenance work such as the grinding project currently taking place where the frequency of trains were reduced, and the third type was projects that were planned and have a slightly more substantial impact on service. Mr. Shetty reviewed a list of projects that staff identified to take place soon. Rail replacement, bond box replacement, and Othello and Rainier Beach Station platform repair was discussed in 2022 and the other projects listed in the presentation were added this year. Those included high voltage system assessment, Royal Brougham grade crossing repair, overhead wire replacement, and system expansion improvements. This work was planned to begin in late Q2/early Q3 2023.

Rail replacement near Westlake was a project that would rebuild rail in the 90-degree curve northbound between University Street and Westlake. This was necessary because the rail defects and accelerated wear was causing poor ride quality and jerking motions. Passengers would benefit from this project and experience faster and smoother travel through that curve.

The bond box replacement project would replace 60 embedded bond boxes that housed signal connections to the tracks. This was necessary because the tunnel bus operations between 2007 and 2019 progressively damaged the boxes, leading to occasional signal failures and train delays. Passengers would benefit from more reliable signaling system and fewer service disruptions.

The high voltage system assessment would inspect and evaluate the high voltage electrical system to confirm system integrity. This was necessary because regular inspection and evaluation would ensure high voltage system remained in good working order. This would help prevent future failures and service disruptions, which passengers would benefit from.

The Royal Brougham grade crossing repair project would repair track grade to prevent standing water over the tracks during the rainy period. This was necessary because during heavy rain fall, water pools on the tracks required trains to slow down to 5 mph; heavy rain could disrupt service. Passengers would benefit from faster and more reliable service in wet weather conditions.

The Othello and Rainier Beach platform repairs would be similar work to what was completed in Columbia City station in 2022. New tiles would last longer and be easier to maintain. This was necessary because failing tiles and underlying concrete were a trip/fall hazard and were not ADA-compliant. Passengers would benefit from renewed platforms that were safer and have a longer service life.

Overhead wire replacement was similar to work that was completed near Tukwila in 2022. The work would replace worn contact wire. The current contact wire, which delivered power to light rail vehicles, was worn, and risked unplanned service failure. Replaced contact wire would restore reliability and prevent risk of unplanned impacts.

Additional projects currently in planning in the year ahead for Q2 2023 to Q1 2024 included Northgate Station railing and electromagnetic cable improvements, a project to improve safety on the Northgate platform and tunnel, and Lynnwood Link prep work, a project completing overhead power work to connect the future 1 Line north extension.

The final system expansion related work would include completing the connection of 1 and 2 Lines. This would consist of completing overhead power, plinth repair, activating rail switches, and other work to connect the future 2 Line to the current 1 Line. Prep work was anticipated to start as early as late Q2/Q3 2023 to minimize effects on service during full connection. Full connection was targeted for Q1 2024. Completing the connection would require major service disruption of a potential multi-week single tracking.

Mr. Shetty noted that although definite service impact dates were not yet available, staff was continuing to find ways to improve the passenger experience and mitigate service disruptions. Examples included developing Passenger Care Plans for each service disruption, adding longer lead time before service disruptions to scale up mitigation and communication resources, committing to having updated general transit feed specification for accurate trip planning during major disruptions, having staff volunteer as ambassadors, and providing key information in multiple languages.

Next steps included continuing to refine project level plans and minimizing impacts of service disruptions for passengers, continuing to look for efficiencies and opportunities to consolidate the work across the system, engaging riders and stakeholders, and provide regular updates to the committee with refined project details moving forward.

Boardmember Roscoe asked about the electromagnetic cables being a unique situation with the construction at Northgate. Mr. Shetty responded that issue was related to the November 26, 2021 incident with a bolt that protruded. Boardmember Roscoe asked if that was unique to that particular system. Mr. Shetty replied that it had a cable that monitors vibration because of the sensitivity with UW above the tunnel. Those electromagnetic cables were suspended between the floating slabs. There was a temporary fix in measure, but the permanent fix is what staff was researching.

Chair Walker asked if there were ways to complete various projects simultaneously to avoid multiple closures of service. Mr. Shetty replied that there were ways to accomplish that by identifying project scope and timing, however having multiple contractors in one space could also pose a safety hazard. Mr. Shetty acknowledged that staff keeps in mind with the local calendar of special events and attempts to avoid scheduling work during those events but there was still weather dependent work or temperature dependent work.

Chair Walker asked how community events could be communicated with Sound Transit for their awareness. Mr. Arnold committed to providing that information at a later time, but noted several internal teams track local events.

Chair Walker asked what the process was for deciding when to provide alternative routes or methods of service. Mr. Shetty responded that it was a mindful process amongst a large group of staff that discuss the best options for riders. CEO Timm commented that some of these projects were set to complete by the February or March 2023 timeframe. Previously, certain projects appeared rushed, and staff was working to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of scheduling work to not interfere with local events and have the least disruption to riders. Mr. Shetty added that a project would be prioritized if there were safety related issues.

Fare Ambassador Update

Russ Arnold, Acting Deputy CEO Service Delivery Officer, introduced Sean Dennerlein, the agency's new Deputy Director of Passenger Success. Mr. Dennerlein announced Sandee Ditt's departure and thanked her for her prior years' work at the agency. Mr. Dennerlein reviewed the program assessment summary which provided the first in-depth review of year-over-year comparisons. Daily inspection rate averages increased by 145 percent. Ridership impacts increased, meaning there was 1 fare ambassadors for every 174,000 passengers, compared to the 1 for every 75,000 in 2021.

A 15 percent fare compliance data point referred to passengers that ambassadors had explicitly seen and screened and determined they did not pay fares but should have paid fares. This was approximately 200 percent difference in compliance compared to pre-pandemic levels. An increase in that percentage could be due to more ambassadors being present on the systems or stations. There was a clear increase in education for passengers on the systems. Mr. Dennerlein shared upcoming opportunities including Paid Zone inspections, resolution program, citation policy, expanded communication efforts, and staffing expansion.

Mr. Dennerlein shared an overview of upcoming opportunities within this program and provided a summary of status and drivers.

The 15 percent data point did not showcase the amount of time it would take for fare ambassadors to engage with riders. Staff adjusted this time and set a goal ratio of 1:6, meaning for every 30 seconds it would take to do an inspection, it would take about 3 minutes to give a warning and eventually a citation because this team would approach these situations from a lens of customer service. The previous program ratio was about 1:2 and past protocols included about 15 seconds to do an inspection and 30 seconds for a warning. The approximate 3-minute experience was efficient and effective enough to connect and coach riders to comply. Events that were not accounted for in that time goal ration were lifesaving, passenger navigation, disruption support, cleaning and reporting, and crisis support.

Mr. Dennerlein shared some feedback from a passenger survey on the fare ambassadors.

Boardmember Roscoe thanked the ambassadors for their work and efforts and shared her personal brief interaction while on a system. Chair Walker echoed Boardmember Roscoe.

Chair Walker asked where the passenger survey feedback was taken from. Mr. Dennerlein and Mr. Arnold shared that at point of engagement, an opportunity of feedback was provided as well as other opportunities such as the Sounding Board.

Chair Walker asked about the current number of hired ambassadors. Mr. Dennerlein answered, 17 including Supervisors and was working towards increasing recruitment efforts. Mr. Arnold shared the goal number of hires was 26 and the current number of hires had been stable.

Chair Walker asked if staff volunteering for ambassador shifts went hand in hand with Mr. Dennerlein's presentation. Mr. Arnold replied that the agency had fare ambassadors that would be deployed in moments of previously scheduled outages. In cases there were abrupt outages or situations, a request to internal staff would be sent out to gather volunteers for extra assistance.

Chair Walker asked if the fare ambassador positions were strictly full time at the moment. Mr. Dennerlein replied that there were current part time employees and mentioned the efforts with recruiting the correct candidates while remaining flexible to candidate needs.

Presentation on Fares Strategy

Alex Krieg, Director of Access, Integration, and Station Area Planning, provided the presentation. Mr. Krieg provided an overview of Board events that began with a Workshop on fare revenue issues in 2022 leading into 2023 when the Board formally reduced ORCA LIFT fare to \$1 through Resolution No. R2023-05. An area of focus in 2023 included major policy topics. The fare policy was originally adopted in 2010 with a minor update in 2014. The specific topics of focus included fare structure and farebox recovery targets. The Parking management program was also an area of focus. The program's last Board action was in 2018 to allow priced monthly parking permits. An area of focus was an expanded program with daily paid parking.

Mr. Krieg shared the current fare structure across the Sound Transit district followed by a fare table for adult fares after ST2 projects open. If there were no changes to the current fare structure, fares would range from \$2.25 to \$2.45 dependent on link travel destinations.

Distance-based fare considerations included fares depended on how far a passenger travels, it required passengers to tap on and off, and if they didn't tap off, they were charged the highest fare from their originating station. Flat fare considerations included one fare for all rides, which would be simpler for passengers to understand and budget for. Flat fares required passengers to only tap on and a simplified fare structure could allow for potential transition to fare capping.

Farebox recovery targets were established in the existing Fare policy. Farebox recovery ratio was the percentage of operating expenses made up by passenger fares. Fares were only a portion of Sound

Transit's revenues and did not fully fund operations. Farebox recovery below the minimum recovery targets signaled that fare revenues were not keeping pace with costs of operations and that the financial plan was threatened.

Mr. Krieg noted that the agency was out of compliance with the Board-adopted fare policy. Link farebox recovery was well below 40 percent policy. Sounder farebox recovery was well below 23 percent policy and ST Express was well below 20 percent policy. Sounder and ST Express were above the farebox recovery targets prior to 2020. Mr. Krieg noted the existing fare policy that falling below targets should trigger a fare change process. Chair Walker asked how the future percentages were determined and why they were anticipated to remain at a lower percentage. Mr. Krieg responded that it was a function of how the agency handles financial planning which included many projections, such as farebox recovery. That also included ridership levels, fare compliance, and so forth. Chad Davis, Deputy Director of Fares, commented that periodic changes were layered in to reflect a fair increase, but it was discovered that a fair change couldn't be layered in to get back towards fare compliance. Chair Walker asked about Link percentages, particularly Tacoma Link, with its opening and why that caused percentages to decrease. Mr. Krieg replied that Tacoma Link was considered a different mode that did not currently have a set farebox recovery rate for. Mr. Davis added that staff was directed to pause on Tacoma Link farebox recovery rates until the service had been in place for one to two years. Chair Walker asked if it would then be a part of Link service or continue to be in its own category. Mr. Davis confirmed it would be separate. Mr. Krieg noted future in-depth briefings would be presented on the topic.

The third topic of focus was moving towards daily paid parking following Board direction and introducing a new fare-like cost on some passengers. Existing conditions and policy considerations included parking demand being much lower since the pandemic but was growing, some facilities were very full, ridership was sensitive to parking availability and parking price, and pandemic-related trends such as more people working from home or in a hybrid work setting and potential reduced demand for monthly permits.

Next steps toward a comprehensive fares strategy included diving deeper at Executive and Rider Experience and Operations Committee meetings on fare structure, farebox recovery targets, and daily paid parking during Spring 2023. In Summer 2023, next steps included public and passenger engagement on potential fare policy changes, Link fare changes, and daily paid parking. In Fall 2023 and Winter 2024, next steps included potential Board actions to update existing fare policy, including fare structure changes and daily paid parking.

Boardmember Roscoe asked when the policy changes would return to the Committee and Board. Mr. Krieg answered that today's presentation was an introduction to the topic and the over the next few months, staff would return to provide additional opportunities for Board members to become familiar with the topic. A decision would come later this year in time for the light rail expansion if the Board was prepared to make the decision. Mr. Arnold commented that a time period of 6 months was required from the date of decision to date of implementation.

Chair Walker asked if the Long-Range Financial Plan was based on the farebox recovery rates that were presented today. Mr. Krieg confirmed and noted that was the cause of the Board Workshop from 2022. Chair Walker asked if decisions would be made individually or as one action. Mr. Krieg responded there would be separate actions: fare policy update, Link fares related actions if the Board chooses, and parking management action. Chair Walker asked if the engagement planned for Summer 2023 was budgeted. Mr. Krieg confirmed.

Executive session – None.

Other business – None.

Next meeting

Thursday, April 6, 2023
1:30 to 3:30 p.m.
Ruth Fisher Boardroom and Virtually via WebEx

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 3:10 p.m.

ATTEST:

Kristina Walker
Rider Experience and Operations Committee Chair

Kathryn Flores
Board Administrator

APPROVED on _____, JG.