

*3/2/2023 Rider Experience and Operations
Committee Meeting Written Public
Comment Submissions*

Submissions

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Stephen Fesler

Dear REO Members:

I am once again contacting you about rider experience and operations. These issues continue to be problematic in the transit system. I am asking you to address the following:

- Link frequencies continue to be below pre-pandemic levels. Riders want service restored now.

- Service levels otherwise on ST services continue to be a shell of themselves. Please work on policies and efforts to get partner agencies to hire and retain operations and maintenance staff. Transit Center has an excellent resource on this.

<https://transitcenter.org/publication/bus-operators-in-crisis/>

- Sanitation is still abysmal in stations and trains. Metrics and dashboards aren't going to fix this. The CEO did commission a change on train cleanings recently and it was a bit noticeable but it's clearly not been enough. Platforms, station halls, tracks, and even hanging equipment is littered with garbage and it's not evident cleaning is even happening with regularity. It's disgusting to walk over and by trash and substances so frequently. Many seats on trains also are routinely soiled. NYC's subway is so much tidier, and that's a low bar. And by the way, they have trash bins on platforms. We need to be deep cleaning stations and trains every day. That means collecting garbage bin waste frequently, sweeping, vacuuming, washing, and even making spaces smell fresh. Please fix this. It's just such an embarrassment and unwelcoming. Please start commissioning workshops on this very expansive problem.

- Vandalism is becoming rampant in stations. Stations walls are collecting graffiti and walls inside and outside stations and on equipment are being tagged up with stickers. This often happens where there is no advertising or art. Maybe that could reduce some of this, but this is being left to fester and attracting more vandalism every week.

- Vertical conveyances continue to be a mess and it's not evident anything is really improving anywhere. The CEO has intervened in some cases where people reported issues and that's commendable, but we can't have Julie fielding Twitter complaints like Elon Musk because of agency inadequacies. She's got a lot on her hands as it is that needs decision-making and direction. It really seems workshops need to be carried out to explore what can be done now, what can be done in the mid-term, and what can be done in the long-term. Past briefings on this have been wholly inadequate and just telling you what might be done. That's not really engaging and collaboration. And I just have to point out, the vertical conveyances in downtown Seattle are not anticipated to be fully replaced until sometime in the 2030s. That's just not acceptable. We need to know what a real plan is to deal with this and it needs to be fully funded today. Money should be no object here and we can't keep waiting for piecemeal updates. That's only brought us stasis.

- The at-grade MLK segment is a real problem. Sound Transit has a lot of ideas on how to address it but basically none of them are funded. Please read through this report and work to implement it.

<https://www.scribd.com/document/626796510/Sound-Transit-MLK-Corridor-Rail-at-Grade-Crossing-Safety-Review-Technical-Memorandum-2022>

- I am aware that PIMS may be launched partially or otherwise this year. Please continue to put pressure on getting at least the signs in the stations working with real-time information. The other aspects of PIMS will be great, but the signs are of utmost importance. This is an issue that just irks riders and maybe for the average one more than vertical conveyance. Also, you should really look into the PIMS contractor and internal project management of this programme. Something is very wrong and if it's the contractor you should absolutely pursue avenues to never work with them again and/or consider ways to recoup money for botched implementation. This isn't a rocket science. European transit systems have far more complex systems on the most mundane transit systems.

- Bring in riders to tell you their rider experience stories. I don't mean by usual public comment. I mean work with transit rider organisations and boards to find folks to really talk to you at these REO meetings. Find out what they are seeing and feeling. Ask them questions in these meetings as a panel. Or let them present to you.

- The Future Ready work has been challenging at times. This work is absolutely critical and I think most riders get that. ST has improved in trying to limit the time of impacts, but I think further conversations on evaluating options could be helpful in keeping impacts as limited as possible. One thing that has never really been answered is why California Switches aren't being used. I'd suggest investigating this common technique used abroad for light rail construction, which allows temporary placement of crossover tracks to move vehicles around a construction zone. These are easily moveable tracks from site to site. Rainier Valley and downtown seem like locations where this would be hugely beneficial when doing disruptive work.

- Not nearly as important as any of this other stuff, but ST has a station retail strategy. I encourage you to at least just pass a policy of letting small food and drink carts to operate hold-harmless low-cost or permit-free at stations and similar for pop-up events at the few stations that can accommodate them. Maybe even allow vending machines if stations have facilities in place to operate them. This is pretty low-barrier stuff.

<https://www.theurbanist.org/2023/02/13/sound-transit-now-has-a-strategy-for-bringing-retail-into-stations/>





I know most of this stuff isn't as sexy as talking about new digital assistant technologies, but you absolutely must be talking about the above loudly and publicly at most every REO meeting. We can't keep letting the transit system we do have fall apart. Transit is in crisis and it demands serious attention now. Worrying about what transit is in 10, 20, or 30 years is not nearly as pressing and it won't matter if we don't get it right now in this moment.

Kind regards,
Stephen Fesler

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- **Stephen**

[Julia Hobbs](#)

Regarding the Rider Experience & Operations Committee meeting, I would like to comment on my experience with Sound Transit. I live in Issaquah and would love to be able to attend events in Seattle without driving. Concerts, sporting events, and even simple meetings with friends are hampered by the desire to be conscious of my personal contribution to carbon emissions, cost of driving and parking, and lack of parking availability. The bus is a great solution for people living in the suburbs, but there is only one bus an hour in my case in the later evening hours, causing me to reconsider either taking the bus or

going out at all. I believe this service could be expanded and more people would use it if it became available.

Thank you,

Julia H.