

Summary Minutes

Rider Experience and Operations Committee Meeting April 3, 2025

Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Committee Chair Walker and was available for viewing in person and online.

The meeting was recorded and can be found at <https://www.soundtransit.org/get-to-know-us/board-directors/meeting-videos>.

Roll call of members

Chair	Vice Chair
(P) Kristina Walker, Tacoma Councilmember	(P) Ed Prince, Renton Council President

Board Members	
(P) Angela Birney, Redmond Mayor	(P) De'Sean Quinn, King County Councilmember
(P) Christine Frizzell, Lynnwood Mayor	(A) Peter von Reichbauer, King County Councilmember
(P) Hunter George, Fircrest Councilmember	(P) Girmay Zahilay, King County Council Chair

Hunter Rancipher, Board Relations Specialist, announced that a quorum of the committee was present at roll call. Board Vice Chair Balducci was also in attendance.

Report of the Chair – None

CEO Report

Chief Executive Officer Dow Constantine provided the report.

Results of Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel (DSTT) Closure for Rail Replacement

CEO Constantine provided an outline of the results and effects of the closure of the DSTT for rail replacement between April 14 – April 23, 2025. He acknowledged that passenger disruptions were significant, with further confusion caused by the Passenger Information Management System. CEO Constantine also noted that positive feedback was received on the agency's communication and passenger support protocols.

Activation Update

CEO Constantine provided details on various activation updates throughout the system. He noted that the Downtown Redmond Link Extension would open for service on Saturday, May 10, 2025. A speaking program will begin at 10:30 a.m., with the first train open for passenger service leaving Downtown Redmond Station at 12:00 p.m. He invited Board members and members of the public to join the agency in celebrating the opening on May 10.

Board member Birney shared her excitement at the opening of the Downtown Redmond Extension, noting that it will be the first project from ST3 to open.

Public comment

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

In-person verbal comments were given by the following person:

Joe Kunzler

There were no written or virtual comments.

Business Items

For Committee final action

April 3, 2025, Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting minutes

It was moved by Committee Vice Chair Prince, seconded by Board member Birney, and carried by the unanimous vote of all committee members present that the minutes of the April 3, 2025, Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting be approved as presented.

For Recommendation to the Board

Motion No. M2025-23: Authorizing the chief executive officer to execute an Amendment to modify the existing Operating Agreement with the National Railroad Passenger Corporation allowing intercity and interstate passenger service to operate on the Sound Transit-owned Lakewood Subdivision corridor between Nisqually and Tacoma.

CEO Constantine provided remarks noting that the agency had reached an agreement with Amtrak to allow its full schedule of 6 Amtrak Cascade round trips through the Sound Transit-owned corridor between Nisqually and Tacoma. He thanked Amtrak for their engagement with the agency on an analysis on delays on that corridor over the last 18 months.

Martin Young provided additional remarks on the agreement.

It was moved by Committee Vice Chair Prince, seconded by Board member Birney, and carried by the unanimous vote of all committee members present that Motion No. M2025-23 be forwarded to the Board with a do-pass recommendation.

Discussion on Sound Transit On-Board Dog Policy

Chair Walker provided opening remarks on the topic suggested by Board Vice Chair Balducci. She noted that staff had prepared a presentation on the topic and welcomed Board Vice Chair Balducci to provide any opening remarks prior to the presentation.

Vice Chair Balducci noted that this topic came about from discussions on the opening of the Downtown Redmond Link Extension, which includes a station at Marymoor Village that has close access to a large dog park. She explained that this led her to research the agency's current policy for allowing dogs on board agency vehicles and noted a discrepancy between current policy as written and its implementation. This caused her to request staff to develop the presentation to be given and seek a change to the agency's current policy regarding on-board pet allowance. Vice Chair Balducci further noted that the intention of the discussion today was to seek feedback, with the goal of bringing back a new policy direction at a later Board or committee meeting.

Brian de Place, Acting Passenger Success Deputy Executive Director, provided the presentation on the agency's dog policy.

Mr. de Place noted that various dog parks and other pet amenities exist along the agency's system, giving special attention to the Marymoor Dog Park that will have a close connection at Marymoor Village Station once the Downtown Redmond Link Extension opens.

Mr. de Place gave a view of the agency's present state. Sound Transit's current policy allows pets on board agency vehicles if they are in a pet carrier, with service animals allowed without container provided they are under the full control of their handler. No pets are allowed on seats. He also acknowledged that riders are not engaged by agency personnel if pets are under the control of their handler in general, and that agency staff do not customarily request details on service animal status.

Mr. de Place then described the current landscape of pet policies between Sound Transit and other peer agencies. He noted that while all agencies allow pets on their system, there are a variety of requirements depending on the specific agency. He also noted that the most common requirement is that pets must be in a carrier. Mr. de Place explained that some agencies use descriptive policies outlining behavioral requirements for pets, while other agencies provide guidelines for pet storage and physical control.

Mr. de Place also provided information on other national Light Rail operators, noting that many others also require pets to be held in carriers when on board vehicles. He also specifically noted that the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority allows large dogs on vehicles outside carriers if necessary, but that this exception is curtailed with restrictions around peak hours and large events.

Mr. de Place gave information on the passenger experience impacts of a change in the policy. He noted that it may positively affect inclusion for riders who require transit to access different amenities along the alignment, and that the policy could be rewritten with a focus on behavioral guidelines and handler control. Mr. de Place also cautioned on potential difficulties in a new policy, including impacts to passenger comfort and safety, pet handler safety (such as dog leashes getting caught in train doors, and pet safety during crowding).

Mr. de Place noted an outline for next steps, which include seeking feedback from the committee during this meeting, with a motion being brought forward at the June Executive meeting, with final action at the June Board of Directors meeting.

Committee Vice Chair Prince asked if there are any caveats in the current policies for dealing with pet accidents on the train and what impacts that may have. Mr. de Place noted that the current policy is high level, and that examples of potential areas of concern and consideration are appreciated as staff develops a draft proposal for new policy. Chair Walker shared her agreement with the sentiment and requested follow-up on the frequency of incidents currently experienced on the system.

Board member Birney noted that she wanted to see what information could be provided on behavioral incidents for pets, and what current staff policy is to address potential issues. She also noted the importance of enforceability of any policy, while acknowledging that there are other priorities that she doesn't want staff to be distracted from.

Board member George echoed concerns about policy enforceability, noting his experience from working for a parks district and the warning of passing and creating unenforceable guidelines. He also noted that he appreciated that this policy appears to exist within the CEO's administrative duties, and that it may be best to just request the CEO look into the matter while not expending significant staff and Board resources. He also asked whether this policy would be applicable to all agency vehicles or just trains. Mr. de Place noted that the current policy as it exists applies to all vehicles.

Board member Frizzell shared her agreement with many of the points raised by Board member George. She shared her own experiences with pets in her family, expressing concerns about potential liability for pet behavioral issues.

Board member Quinn shared his desire for additional details on policy implications such as labor costs and operational impacts. He also asked if there are other examples of a matured pet policy that the agency can draw from.

Board member Birney noted her own perspective that when she boards a train, that she has an obligation to ensure a positive and undistruptive passenger experience for others. She posited that it may be more prudent for the agency to look at general rider conduct standards to see if that would be a better way to address previously raised enforceability concerns.

Reports to the Committee

Passenger Impact Program

Pamela Wrenn, Link Right-of-Way Access Senior Program Manager, provided the report.

Ms. Wrenn noted that the DSTT closure was complete, with 600 feet of rail replaced, resulting in the elimination of delays caused by repeated disruptions when the rail previously broke. She also noted that four additional piggyback resiliency projects were completed during the closure. Ms. Wrenn also described the various passenger struggles that were noted, such as long headways and poor passenger information and confusion. She further noted that while a circulator bus that was established to ease crowding was not well utilized, there was an increase in local bus traffic. Further retrospectives are underway to apply lessons learned to future disruption planning.

Ms. Wrenn provided information on future work at Pinehurst station scheduled for Q2 of 2025. She noted that the construction of stairwells at the station would take place from March 24, 2025 to April 13, 2025, and from April 26, 2025 to May 30, 2025. She noted that this work would result in single tracking from 5:30 p.m. to the end of service on weekdays during those periods, with 12-minute headways system-wide. She further noted that this will occur on weekends as well, except for days with major events.

Ms. Wrenn gave information on scheduled annual rail grinding, which is required to properly maintain the rails to avoid potential breaks and premature wear along the system. The work is planned to occur throughout May and June of 2025 on some weekdays. When the work is underway, trains will single track between 11 p.m. and the close of service, leading to headways of up to 20 minutes systemwide.

Ms. Wrenn noted that the last weekend of closure for 2 Line integration into the DSTT is scheduled for June 7 – 8, with a bus bridge running from Capitol Hill Station to SODO Station.

Chair Walker thanked Ms. Wrenn and work crews for their dedication through 24-hour days to ensure this important work was completed promptly with minimal impacts.

Board member Birney asked what the key takeaway was from the underutilization of the circulator bus during the DSTT closure. Mr. Wrenn responded that this was a first, as DSTT closures typically result in no service, whereas this disruption had partial service. She noted that the increase indicated that passenger were taking steps to avoid the disruption where possible.

REO Metrics Presentation

Raj Cheriell, Essential Data and Analytics Director, and Shelley Xie, Link Operations Director, provided the report. Mr. Cheriell noted that the topic of this meeting's presentation was a peer agency review of Link operating statistics against other national Light Rail operators. He further noted that all data used for the comparison can be found on the Sound Transit website within the System Performance Tracker tool.

Ms. Xie provided information on Link service efficiency, as measured by boardings per revenue hour. She noted the Sound Transit is leading all other peer agencies post-COVID, suggesting that the region has had a healthy recovery from the pandemic not seen elsewhere, caused largely by the continued expansion of the system through completion and opening of different ST2 expansions.

Ms. Xie presented data on average trip length, measured by passenger miles per boarding. She noted that the agency has one of the longest average trip lengths due to the shape of the Link system, being primarily one long Light Rail line.

Ms. Xie gave details on Link's cost effectiveness, measured by total operating costs per boarding. She explained that the agency is similar to other peer agencies, at an average of \$8.82 per boarding, which is a good rate for the relatively expensive market that Sound Transit operates in.

Ms. Xie noted that Link's capital labor commitment is significantly higher than all peer agencies, as Sound Transit is one of the only transit systems still undergoing large capital expansion in the country.

Ms. Xie highlighted Link's investment in facilities maintenance, measured by maintenance hours per operations employee hours. She noted that this figure is high, as Sound Transit maintains a highly complex system with a significant portion either underground or elevated. Ms. Xie noted that this high relative number also reflects the agency's commitment to infrastructure maintenance and efforts to keep stations clean.

Ms. Xie explored Link vertical transportation, measured by the number of elevators per station. She noted that the agency has the highest number of elevators per station against all peers, with an average of almost three elevators per station, or about two times the peer average. Ms. Xie noted that escalators are six times the peer average. She noted that this is reflective of the agency's commitment to passenger accessibility and flow efficiency, while also noting that it reflects that the Link alignment is largely elevated or subterranean.

Ms. Xie detailed Link's average distance between stations, at about .4 miles. She noted that this is similar to other Light Rail systems that serve downtown and surrounding suburban areas.

Ms. Xie provided information on Link's investment in vehicles, which is primarily reflective of the agency's procurement of Light Rail Vehicles (LRVs). She noted an uptick in spending just after 2020, which coincides with the procurement and delivery of Series 2 LRVs.

Board member Quinn asked whether the comparison of average boardings per revenue hour accounted for different operating times of contrasting systems. Mr. Cheriel responded that the data was normalized by the amount of boardings across service throughout an entire year, which should balance out against differing revenue hours.

Chair Walker asked whether the vertical transportation metrics were reflective that Sound Transit has fewer at-grade stations compared to other agencies. Ms. Xie responded that it was primarily reflective of the terrain within the region.

Chair Walker asked whether data could be provided on safety of the Link system compared to peers. Mr. Cheriel responded that he would follow-up with the committee on that data.

Chair Walker asked how this data was being used in staff decision making processes. Acting Service Delivery Deputy CEO Marie Olson responded that this data was being used in cross collaborative settings between Sound Transit and other local agencies to help find potential areas for improvement.

Executive session – None

Other business – None

Next meeting

Thursday, June 5, 2024
1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
Ruth Fisher Boardroom and Virtually via Zoom.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:17 p.m.

ATTEST:

Kristina Walker
Rider Experience and Operations Committee Chair

Kathryn Flores
Board Administrator

APPROVED on _____, HRR.