

Memo

August 21, 2026

To:	<i>Sound Transit Board of Directors</i>
From:	<i>Dow Constantine, Chief Executive Officer</i>
Subject:	<i>Fare Gates Pilot – Summary of Board Member Inquiries</i>
Staff Leads:	<i>Brian de Place, Executive Director, Security & Fare Engagement</i>
Relevant Staff Contacts:	<i>Camilla Walter and Leda Chahim, GCR</i>
Additional Reference Materials:	<u>8/6/26 REO Presentation</u> on Fare Gates Pilot

The August 27 Board meeting will include consideration of the Fare Gates pilot motion, which was forwarded by the REO committee with a recommendation for approval. This memo summarizes the key themes and inquiries raised by Board members and Sound Transit's responses to date. Questions have focused on three areas: 1) financial case and fare compliance; 2) accessibility and fare media; and 3) evaluation criteria, location selection and design.

FARE GATES INQUIRIES AND RESPONSES

Financial Case and Fare Compliance:

Board members have asked about the financial case for fare gates, including the relationship between existing fare compliance and return on investment, performance of the current fare compliance model during large events, ongoing operating costs, and how additional fare revenue would be treated.

- Financial Planning & Analysis estimates a potential \$164 million net benefit to the Long-Range Financial Plan over 10 years, compared with approximately \$580 million in gross fare revenue benefit identified in the fare gate analysis. Additional analysis is needed to determine how incremental revenue would be allocated among subareas.
- It is anticipated with gates we could achieve 95% fare compliance at gated stations. The current Sound Transit financial plan assumes 75% fare compliance. Recent World Cup events demonstrated limitations of the current approach, with estimated fare compliance still falling below the financial plan assumptions despite significant additional staffing.
- The financial analysis includes ongoing operating, maintenance, and software costs as well as upfront design and capital costs.

Accessibility and Fare Media

Board members have emphasized that fare gates should not create barriers for riders who rely on free or reduced fares, including youth, and have asked about potential impacts on regional partners and rider travel behavior.

- Equity and accessibility would be central to pilot implementation and evaluation. This includes coordination with regional partners on enrollment, fare media distribution, customer education, and support.
- The pilot provides an opportunity to advance and strengthen engagement, partnerships and workstreams around youth fare enrollment and distribution; and access to free and reduced fare media. These workstreams would be developed alongside the formal RFP, design, procurement, and technical development. All of this work would need to be in place before implementation of gates at any station.

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- Sound Transit does not currently have data identifying the share of riders unable to pay due to financial hardship. Approximately 11,000 customers use subsidized annual passes, and more than 91,000 active ORCA LIFT customers receive reduced fares across the region.
- For youth, the pilot would evaluate how free-fare access works in a gated environment, including potential digital fare media options.
- Sound Transit will also evaluate the customer support and staffing needed at gated stations to ensure that youth and other eligible riders are not unnecessarily prevented from accessing transit while new processes are implemented and refined.
- The staffing assumptions assume that Agency Fare Ambassadors would be present at gated stations to assist passengers, as this role transitions from one emphasizing compliance through fare-checks and education to a role more focused on passenger support and accessing fare gates, for which the Fare Ambassadors are well-suited. This would also reduce the potential opportunities for conflict between Sound Transit staff and passengers when performing fare compliance activities, even as some compliance related work may continue after pilot implementation

Evaluation Criteria Framework, Location Selection and Design

Board members have expressed interest in how potential pilot locations were identified, and how station configuration, ridership, financial performance, and operating conditions factor into selection decisions. Board members have also expressed interest in the criteria that will be used to evaluate the pilot and how the results will inform any future decisions about fare gates.

- The pilot will include clear evaluation measures and baseline data to assess outcomes, including changes in fare compliance and revenue, capital and operating costs, access, rider experience, and staffing needs. A proposed amendment from Board member Balducci would further define pieces of the evaluation framework.
- The evaluation framework will consider impacts on youth and other riders using free or reduced fare programs. This includes fare media, customer support, and access needs. Staff will report pilot findings to the Board at regular REO meetings, which will be used to inform any future recommendations. A proposed amendment from Board member Balducci would direct the development of detailed plans related to outreach, tracking, and strategies related to this work.
- Sound Transit will also look to peer agencies and utilize industry best practices to develop evaluation criteria. Lessons learned through peer agency engagement can inform the criteria.
- The pilot is intended to test fare gates across a range of station types and operating environments to inform any future systemwide recommendations while balancing financial return on investment. Additional detail on the location analysis and selection criteria is provided in the attached presentation.
- While Stadium Station is not proposed for the pilot, experience from other major transit systems demonstrates that fare gates can be successfully operated during large events through a combination of station operations, staffing, crowd management, and appropriate gate configurations.
 - Several peer systems operate gated stations serving venues with capacities comparable to Lumen Field (~69,000) and T-Mobile Park (~48,000), or Husky Stadium (~70,000), including Morgan Boulevard Station in Washington DC (which serves Northwest

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- Stadium, capacity ~63,000), NRG Station in Philadelphia (which serves Lincoln Financial Field, capacity ~67,500), Vine City Station in Atlanta (which serves Mercedes-Benz Stadium capacity ~71,000).
- Sound Transit already meters passenger access to event stations during periods of high demand. Fare gate design would build on this approach, with sufficient gate capacity and throughput incorporated into station design to maintain safe and efficient flow.
 - University of Washington Station will be a good test case for how we manage events, but is grade-separated with a large plaza which allows us to test with lower risk. Stadium Station could be considered for a future deployment once we have improved our staffing strategies. Part of the next phase of the fare gates pilot project will help us define criteria to assist with more retrofits.
 - Board members have asked how fare gates could be incorporated into the design of future stations. The proposed Board action would provide this direction to staff to consider fare gates in the design of new stations.
 - Considering fare gates during initial station design could reduce future costs and disruption. While costs vary by station, staff estimates that retrofitting an existing station could cost approximately twice as much as incorporating gates during initial construction, in addition to potentially requiring service disruptions.