

Motion No. M2026-30

Establishing a Fare Gate Retrofit Pilot Program

Meeting:	Date:	Type of action:
Rider Experience and Operations Committee	08/06/2026	Recommend to Board
Board	08/27/2026	Final Action

Staff name:	Staff title:
Ed Cobean	Transit Operations Deputy CEO
Brian de Place	Security and Fare Engagement Executive Director

Proposed action

Authorizes the chief executive officer to advance design, procurement, and implementation planning activities for the Fare Gate Retrofit Pilot program to install fare gates at up to fourteen light rail stations.

Key features summary

- In June 2026, Sound Transit staff briefed the Executive Committee and Board of Directors on the findings from a directed fare gate retrofit study (Motion No. M2025-54), which recommended a 14-station Fare Gate Retrofit Pilot program.
- This action would authorize staff to advance design, procurement, and implementation planning for the Pilot Program, and requires staff to return to the Board prior to the start of pilot construction activities with refined costs, station locations, and readiness information.
- As part of the implementation work, staff will work to establish evaluation milestones and off-ramps to allow the Board to maintain, modify, or discontinue the Pilot program. This work is expected to be phased and take occur over several years as the Pilot program is in effect.
- \$6,000,000 will be included in the Proposed 2027 Budget and TIP for the Fare Gate Retrofit Pilot project within the Transit Technology Program for the initial scope of implementation work.
- As part of pilot implementation, the Chief Executive Officer will identify and advance efforts to increase access to ORCA LIFT and youth ORCA card programs and will report to the Board on those efforts prior to the start of pilot fare gates revenue service.
- This action directs staff to include fare gates in ST3 station designs.

Background

In December 2025, the Sound Transit Board adopted Motion No. M2025-64, directing the Chief Executive Officer to conduct a fare gate retrofit implementation study and to report the findings to the Board with a staff recommendation that could include a fare gate pilot.

In response to this direction, Sound Transit completed a systemwide fare gate retrofit study during 2025–2026. The study evaluated Link stations for potential fare gate deployment using a range of

criteria, including ridership and transfer activity, station design and constructability, operational and staffing considerations, equity and accessibility factors, and return on investment. The study also reviewed peer transit agency experience and assessed how fare gates could complement Sound Transit's fare engagement approach.

The study findings indicate that a pilot focused on a limited number of high-ridership and operationally complex stations would provide meaningful data on fare recovery, passenger experience, staff safety and effectiveness, maintenance impacts, and operational performance. A pilot approach also allows Sound Transit to evaluate mitigation strategies for youth riders, reduced-fare customers, passengers without ORCA cards, and riders with accessibility needs in a controlled, test-and-learn environment before considering broader deployment.

Staff recommend proceeding with a fare gate retrofit pilot implemented in phases over multiple years. Certain elements of the pilot—such as detailed operating concepts, fare media solutions, and youth and reduced-fare strategies—will continue to be refined during implementation planning and will be brought back to the Board prior to the start of pilot revenue service.

This proposed action authorizes the chief executive officer to initiate implementation activities necessary to advance the pilot while maintaining Board oversight through defined return points and evaluation milestones.

Staff also recommend the Board provide guidance to Sound Transit to incorporate Fare Gates into future stations currently in planning and design phases. Previous work on station standardization makes this change relatively easy to incorporate, with a potentially higher return on investment as it is easier to add to projects in development when compared to a retrofit. This decision is reversible if it is determined that the agency does not want to pursue fare gates further.

Access to reduced-fare and fare-free programs will be a critical aspect during pilot implementation planning. ORCA LIFT provides reduced-fare transit access for eligible low-income riders, while youth ORCA cards support fare-free access for riders age 18 and younger. As part of pilot implementation planning, Sound Transit will identify opportunities to increase access to these programs and consider approaches that may help eligible riders obtain and use available fare media, such as identifying and reducing barriers to enrollment, card acquisition, and continued use of these programs through targeted outreach, partnerships, and customer support efforts.

Should the Board approve this action, future action and engagement would be required confirming readiness prior to the start of revenue service, including refined costs, station locations, fare media solutions, implementation schedule, and a report on ORCA Lift and youth ORCA card outreach, enrollment, and utilization efforts undertaken in preparation for pilot deployment. Staff would provide periodic Board briefings at approximately years one, three, and five of pilot revenue service to review performance and consider whether to maintain, modify, expand, or discontinue the pilot. Any future actions related to systemwide fare gate deployment or permanent fare policy changes would require separate Board authorization.

Fiscal information

This action in itself does not have a fiscal impact. Upon approval, \$6,000,000 will be included in the Transit Technology program of the 2027 Proposed Budget and TIP, which will require Board approval. The amount of \$6,000,000 will fund the advancement design, procurement, and implementation planning. The entire cost of the project including the construction is estimated to cost \$87,000,000. There will be a future board action to request the construction funds based on the results of the design, procurement, and implementation planning.

Disadvantaged and small business participation

Participation by small businesses and disadvantaged business enterprises (DBEs)

Not applicable to this action.

Public involvement

Staff have identified key coordination opportunities with jurisdiction and transit partners concerning free-fare and reduced fare programs and will establish a specific cadence of engagement. Staff are developing an engagement strategy informed by the Racial Equity Toolkit as well as past successful engagement activities around low-income riders, youth, and fare compliance. The team is working with cross functional partners to identify operational considerations that could inform the engagement approach, facilitate rider behavior change, and enhance the rider experience.

Time constraints

A delay in approving this action would delay initiation of implementation activities, including design, procurement preparation, and coordination with fare media and accessibility improvements. Such delays could extend the overall pilot schedule and reduce opportunities to align pilot implementation with planned system expansion and realizing key revenue outcomes. A one-month delay would slow the pilot schedule but would not materially change study findings.

Prior Board/Committee actions

Motion No. M2025-64: Directed the chief executive officer to (1) conduct a fare gate retrofit implementation study; (2) if study findings support further action, develop a fare gate retrofit pilot proposal; and (3) report the fare gate retrofit implementation study findings to the Board and provide a staff recommendation that may include a fare gate retrofit pilot proposal based on the study findings.

Resolution No. R2022-07: Adopted an updated Fare Compliance policy and superseded Resolution No. R2009-02.

Environmental review – LS for KH 7/29/2026

Legal review – AJP 7/31/2026

Motion No. M2026-30

A motion of the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority authorizing the chief executive officer to advance design, procurement, and implementation planning activities for the Fare Gate Retrofit Pilot program to install fare gates at up to fourteen light rail stations.

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Motion

It is hereby moved by the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority that chief executive officer is authorized to advance design, procurement, and implementation planning activities for the Fare Gate Retrofit Pilot program to install fare gates at up to fourteen light rail stations.

APPROVED by the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority at a regular meeting thereof held on _____.

Dave Somers
Board Chair

Attest:

Kathryn Flores
Board Administrator