



January 22, 2016

Sound Transit Board
The Honorable Dow Constantine, Chair
401 So. Jackson Street
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Chair Constantine and Boardmembers,

In June 2015, the Citizen Oversight Panel (COP) commissioned a task force to explore interagency cooperation between Sound Transit and various transit and transportation-related agencies within the Puget Sound region. The COP has long called for better interagency cooperation. The COP was very gratified by Chair Constantine’s June 12, 2014, Executive Order directing the King County Department of Transportation to establish better coordination between Sound Transit and King County Metro and by the positive results that it has yielded. There has, however, been a perception that imperfect communication and coordination between Sound Transit and other local agencies is still creating friction and inefficiencies.

The COP task force investigated numerous instances of possible coordination failures, and each case was found to be a past issue that has since been addressed, a prospective future issue that may not materialize but still bears watching, or a misunderstanding of current circumstances. We are very pleased to report that we could not identify any current instances where we could assert that better cooperation between Sound Transit and other local agencies would improve service for riders.

An example of a past concern is the UW light rail station and Montlake Triangle project where earlier engagement with King County Metro and better cooperation with the University of Washington and the Seattle Department of Transportation might have created a simpler and more efficient transfer station between busses and light rail. An example of a future concern is the rail attachment options for the I-90 Lake Washington crossing where disagreements between Sound Transit and the Washington Department of Transportation continue to delay the project. An example of a misunderstanding is the ferry connections between Sounder north line service and ferries at Edmonds and Mukilteo that the Citizen Oversight Panel had previously reported as having been poorly synchronized but that do, in fact, support effective transfers for dozens of commuters each day.

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Interagency cooperation is critical to providing the best use of limited funding in providing services to the residents of the Puget Sound region, and continued vigilance is required to ensure that cooperation remains strong. That said, we are very pleased to report that despite perceptions to the contrary, the current work of the various agencies does seem well coordinated and, as such, worthy of our praise.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



Josh Benaloh, Chair
COP Task Force on Interagency Cooperation

Citizen Oversight Panel Year-End Report 2015

January 2016

*The Sound Transit Citizen Oversight Panel
is a 15-member volunteer body appointed by the Sound Transit Board to oversee and monitor
the implementation of Sound Move and ST2.*

*Previous Citizen Oversight Panel reports are available upon request and on the Sound Transit
website at www.soundtransit.org.*

*Panel members welcome comments and input to their work and may be contacted by calling
Shelly Brown, Project Manager at Citizen Oversight Panel at (206) 525-3168, by email at
sbrown@shellybrownassociates.com or by writing to:*

*Citizen Oversight Panel
Union Station
401 South Jackson Street
Seattle, WA 98104*

**CITIZEN
OVERSIGHT
PANEL**

January 22, 2016

Sound Transit Board
The Honorable Dow Constantine, Chair
401 South Jackson Street
Seattle, WA 98104

Re: Citizen Oversight Panel 2015 Year-End Report

Dear Chair Constantine:

This report represents the 19th year that the Citizen Oversight Panel (COP) has reported to the Board and to the public our current assessment of Sound Transit's performance. We appreciate the support we receive from Sound Transit staff to undertake our work and the seriousness with which the Board considers our findings.

For the second consecutive year, economic conditions have improved significantly across the region and much of the country. Higher than anticipated sales tax revenues, passenger fare revenues, federal grants, and other miscellaneous revenues resulted in overall revenues 11 percent above budget at the time of the third quarter financial report. Panel members convey their compliments to Sound Transit for the excellent progress that continues to be made in almost every area of the Agency's programs. The openings of the University Link and South 200th Street extensions in 2016 are eagerly awaited throughout the region, construction of the Northgate extension is well underway, and work on the Lynnwood and East Link extensions has gained momentum during the past year. The year ahead will be particularly eventful as ST2 continues toward completion and the Agency develops its final package of projects for ST3 to present to voters in November 2016.

Major Accomplishments in 2015

Capital Programs

Major progress continues on the Agency's capital program. The University Link Extension is scheduled to open in the first quarter of 2016, significantly ahead of schedule and more than \$150 million below budget. The South 200th Link Extension is expected to open ahead of schedule in the third quarter of 2016 and is trending about \$40 million under budget. Link extensions to Northgate, Lynnwood, and Bellevue and an expansion of Tacoma Link are in various stages of design and construction.

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A preferred alternative for the Operations and Maintenance Satellite Facility (OMSF) was selected last year and design review is ongoing. In addition to the Link extensions, a Sounder roundtrip will be added to the Lakewood/Seattle run in the late morning and early afternoon. An increase of 32,000 hours of service on ST Express equal to 90 new weekday trips will help address the significant overcrowding that has become common over the past several years.

Operating Costs

Operating costs per revenue vehicle hour increased 2 to 6 percent, depending on vehicle mode. The COP is pleased to note that these increases are at a slower pace than recent years.

Ridership Increases

Ridership continues to increase across all modes other than Tacoma Link and Paratransit. Ridership overall was up 4 percent in the third quarter of 2015 compared to the same period last year. ST Express boardings were up 1 percent, Link boardings 5 percent, and Sounder boardings 14 percent overall. The Agency forecasts that the opening of the University Link and South 200th extensions will result in 41 million boardings in 2016, up almost 20 percent over 2015.

Public Involvement

The COP is tasked with monitoring the Agency's performance in eight major areas, including open and timely citizen involvement. Panel members are particularly impressed by Sound Transit's public participation process. Individuals and groups have numerous opportunities to interact with Agency staff throughout the process. Sound Transit informs the public early of the availability of project information and actively seeks community participation at all steps of project planning. The Agency publicizes its programs through a variety of communication tools to reach diverse communities, including those with limited English proficiency and economic barriers. As actively engaged citizens, COP members attend numerous public meetings and see firsthand the benefits of the Agency's outreach efforts.

Agency Coordination

In addition to its public involvement work, the Agency is actively engaged in a transit integration initiative established by King County Executive Order in June 2014 and expanded upon during the past year. The COP applauds this ongoing effort and notes that continued work is needed in the years ahead to ensure that resources are optimized throughout the region.

Areas of Concern

Local Transit Service to Sound Transit Park and Ride Lots

Although the COP is pleased with ongoing coordination efforts in the region, particularly between Sound Transit and King County Metro, we note that improvements remain to be made. Improved local feeder service to area park-and-rides, which are full increasingly early in the day, could mitigate the severe overcrowding. Communities north of Seattle seem particularly impacted by transit riders parking in large and disruptive numbers in residential neighborhoods near ST Express or Metro Rapid Ride lines.

Sounder North Benchmarks

Ridership on Sounder North continues to improve, up 21 percent in the third quarter of this year. Parking spaces at the Edmonds park-and-ride lot are full and there are rider complaints about crowding on some Sounder North trains. Mudslides during the winter continue to result in frequent service cancellations. A Landslide Mitigation Action Plan developed by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF) and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has led to ongoing corridor improvements funded in part by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). However, significant additional investment is needed to create a lasting solution to the problems. Because of Sounder North's relatively low ridership, high cost per rider, and frequently disrupted service, the COP has recommended that the Sound Transit Board set ridership, cost, and service benchmarks in the corridor and identify actions to be taken if specific targets aren't met.

I-90 Track Attachment Design

The mechanism of track attachment on the I-90 floating bridge has been a subject of extensive discussions between Sound Transit and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). Delay in reaching a final agreement on this matter could threaten the timely completion of the East Link extension. We applaud Sound Transit's decision to employ a GC/CM contractor to validate the design and demonstrate the constructability of the I-90 bridge track attachment method. This is an item that warrants continued close attention.

Robustness of the Data Network

Regarding Sound Transit designs and plans for a successor to the current ORCA program, we encourage the development of a less rigid system. It was disappointing to learn how much effort and expense would be required to allow ORCA to be used for parking payment. For example, a more flexible system could treat parking as another transit mode and allow discounts to be given to those who park and ride. As upgrades are incorporated into both the rider-facing ORCA payment system and the back-end operation data networks, special attention should be paid to network security to minimize the risks of breaches that could impact operations, revenues, and even passenger safety.

Subarea Equity

The COP charter explicitly includes monitoring of subarea equity as part of the COP's mission. As the Board considers what package of investments will be included in ST3, the COP recommends that the basic principle of subarea equity be maintained. Tracking of revenues by subarea is generally precise and unambiguous. However, allocation of the benefits a project provides to each subarea is far more subjective. While it has generally been accepted that Central Link benefits all regions of the Sound Transit benefit district, other projects also have broad benefits. For example, when residents of one subarea use transit to travel to work or shop in another subarea, direct benefits accrue to both subareas. The Board should consider a broader definition of "benefits" when applying the principle of subarea equity. The COP recommends that the Board exercise greater flexibility in allocating the "benefits" of candidate projects as it considers which projects to include in the ST3 proposal to extend and improve the regional transit infrastructure.

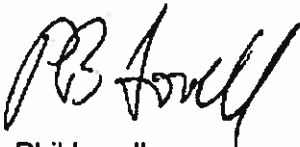
Conclusion

The year ahead will be one of the most significant in Sound Transit's history. The opening of two major light rail extensions and the addition of service on Sounder and ST Express will lead to significant ridership gains. A package of transit enhancements for ST3 will be put before the region's voters in November 2016. The economic decline of the Great Recession has been replaced by rapid economic and job growth and an influx of new residents in search of livable communities and transportation alternatives. Sound Transit and its partners are uniquely capable of addressing these needs.

While the Agency's accomplishments are the result of its dedicated leadership team and staff, they would not have been possible without the leadership and vision of departing CEO Joni Earl. The COP recognizes Joni's legacy and, as it did in 2014, notes the excellent work of Acting CEO Mike Harbour and other Agency staff during her extended medical leave. Finally, the COP extends its welcome to incoming CEO Peter M. Rogoff.

Sincerely,

CITIZEN OVERSIGHT PANEL



Phil Lovell,
Chair

c: Peter M. Rogoff, CEO
Citizen Oversight Panel