



Summary Minutes

Rider Experience and Operations Committee Meeting November 2, 2023

Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by 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/livestream-video>.

Roll call of members

Chair	Vice Chair
(P) Kristina Walker, Tacoma Deputy Mayor	(A) Ed Prince, Renton Councilmember

Board Members	
(P) David Baker, Kenmore Councilmember	(P) Kim Roscoe, Fife Mayor
(P) Christine Frizzell, Lynnwood Mayor	(P) Dave Upthegrove, King County Council Chair
(P) Debora Juarez, Seattle Council President	(A) Peter von Reichbauer, King County Councilmember

Josephine Gamboa, Board Relations Specialist, announced that a quorum of the committee was present at roll call.

Report of the Chair

Monthly Contract Reports

The monthly contract reports were included in members' packets for review.

CEO Report

CEO Julie Timm provided the CEO Report.

Activation Update

On Monday, October 30, 2023, the Redmond Technology Station parking garage opened. CEO Timm joined Board members Constantine and Balducci as well as City of Redmond Angela Birney to celebrate the incremental opening. The early opening of the garage was already expanding transit access and mobility options on the Eastside and would be ready to accommodate even more transit users and Microsoft commuters when the 2 Line opens. Preparations also continued to open two pedestrian and bike overpasses that would further enhance connectivity. Specifically, the opening of the Overlake Station pedestrian bridge across SR 520 by mid-December 2023 or sooner.

East Link Starter Line pre-revenue service

The agency continued to work with King County Metro to begin pre-revenue service this week for the East Link Start Line. Entering pre-revenue service accomplished a significant milestone in the delivery of the East Link Starter Line. This final phase allowed for staff and agency partners to prepare for revenue

service. Activities included operator familiarization with the new alignment and stations, emergency drills, safety certification, preventative maintenance inspections, and completing open construction items.

With the start of this final phase, riders would begin seeing trains on the alignment as operators prepare and test the system for operating conditions. The Safety Engagement team would host ambassador shifts near the at-grade alignment at Bel-Red station to make pedestrians aware of the change in the environment. Additionally, Safety Engagement would kick off the 2 Line safety campaign starting November 2, 2023, including outreach to schools in the area, presentations at community events like Bellevue Essentials, and digital and in-person safety marketing.

Lynnwood Link Extension

This month also began systems integration testing for the Lynnwood Link Extension. This was an important milestone in delivery where the construction was substantially complete and was ready to test the systems constructed to ensure they integrated and operated to meet service needs. The public could see active work on the rail as these critical tests were performed. These tests help identify any issues that may require necessary adjustments before beginning pre-revenue service activities.

Transportation Choices Award/Hall of Fame

CEO Timm announced that later this month, Transportation Choices would host their annual gala and introduce more individuals and programs into the transportation hall of fame. The Fare Ambassador Program would be inducted into their Hall of Fame for its compassionate and innovative approach to fare compliance and passenger engagement. CEO Timm would be in attendance alongside fare ambassadors to celebrate the award. CEO Timm thanked the Transportation Choices Coalition for the recognition, the Board for implementing the forward-thinking program, and the fare ambassadors on the field and trains for their everyday positive interactions with passengers.

Implementing the Fare Compliance Policy

Beginning Wednesday, November 15, 2023, Fare Ambassadors would begin implementation of the updated Fare Compliance Policy as approved by the Board in 2022. Under the updated policy, passengers without proof of payment would receive two warnings in a 12-month period. Additional violations could be resolved with non-monetary options or with \$50 and \$75 fines for third and fourth violations, respectively. Passengers may receive a referral to the courts if they accrued five citations within a 12-month period, but the hope is for this to help people learn how to use the system and access affordable fare options before escalating to the higher citation situations. Leading up to November 15, 2023, the agency would inform the public of this change through in-person engagement from fare and staff Ambassadors, signage at facilities, a press release, blog post and social media. Posters, handouts and paid advertising would be provided in multiple languages. During interactions with passengers, ambassadors would continue sharing information about ORCA LIFT and other reduced fare programs to connect eligible riders with the correct fare.

Public comment

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

The following people provided written comments:

Matthew Sutherland, on behalf Cascade Bicycle Club

Downtown: On the Go!

Transportation Choices Coalition

Katie Wilson, on behalf of Transit Riders Union

Javier Flores

Kaiden Cook
Chris Allen
Maddy Burnett
Jake London
Drako Claw
Gracia Ramirez
Linda Hendrix
Jodi Kogan

The following people provided virtual comments:

Matthew Sutherland
Joe Kunzler

There were no in-person comments submitted.

Business Items

For Committee final action

October 5, 2023, Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting minutes

It was moved by Board member Baker, seconded by Board member Upthegrove and carried by the unanimous vote of all committee members present that the minutes of the October 5, 2023, Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting be approved as presented.

Motion No. M2023-96: Authorizing the chief executive officer to execute a contract with Insight Public Sector, Inc. to provide technology software, hardware, peripherals, and related maintenance services in the amount of \$8,000,000, plus applicable taxes.

Paula Mendoza, Deputy Executive Director of Portfolio Management and Controls, provided the staff presentation.

It was moved by Board member Roscoe, seconded by Board member Upthegrove and carried by the unanimous vote of all committee members present that Motion No. M2023-96 be approved as presented.

Motion No. M2023-97: Authorizing the chief executive officer to execute a contract with Insight Public Sector, Inc. to provide general software, Microsoft software, and related maintenance services in the amount of \$9,000,000, plus applicable taxes.

Paula Mendoza, Deputy Executive Director of Portfolio Management and Controls, provided the staff presentation.

It was moved by Board member Roscoe, seconded by Board member Upthegrove and carried by the unanimous vote of all committee members present that Motion No. M2023-97 be approved as presented.

Reports to the Committee

REO Metrics Presentation – Operations and Safety

Russ Arnold, Deputy CEO Chief Service Delivery Officer, and David Wright, Chief Safety Officer, provided the presentation. This operations report reviewed the month of August 2023. The report included a combined total ridership report for each mode of service along with snapshots of ridership for each individual mode.

For Link, August 2023 began with a number of days that rivaled highest ridership days from July 2023. The first part of August 2023 had eight days of 100,000 boardings which was greater than the seven days in the month of July 2023. However, there was a drop in boardings in late August 2023 as the report suggested many of these were a result of service reductions stemming from large track maintenance projects. Such as when the Capitol Hill and SoDo stations were shut down from August 12-13, 2023 and when Link was single-tracked between Westlake and Stadium stations from August 13-20, 2023 when passengers were required to transfer trains at Pioneer Street Station. These severe service reductions resulted in a significant drop to ridership levels. Additionally, reductions were made as part of maintenance projects between the Othello and Rainier stations from August 21-September 3, 2023. There were enough high ridership days in August 2023 for staff to believe that if high ridership levels continued after maintenance projects, that it could cause crowding and negatively impact ridership experience. The agency would continue to monitor impacts of ridership levels and adjust passenger loads when able to meet demands.

For ST Express, there was a slight increase in On-Time Performance of Pierce Transit operated routes. Over the past two months, there were concerns mentioned regarding the level of performance seen on these services and Mr. Arnold had described a few steps taken in conjunction with partners to address these issues. Mr. Arnold reviewed the month over month graph of Pierce Transit operated routes and every route with the exception of 594 showed improved On-Time Performance.

Mr. Wright reminded the committee that the agency went from having one security contractor to four and would provide an overview of increases due to those contracts. The Safety and Security report reviewed the month of September 2023 and the presentation was focused on 1 Line data, which was presented in the form of a rate of reported incident per 100,000 vehicle revenue miles.

Sound Transit reported 26 collisions for Light Rail service, 17 of the 26 occurred at grade crossings with the majority of 13 having occurred along the Martin Luther King (MLK) corridor. These collisions were spread out along the alignment with no significant locations or clusters. 14 of these collisions were with pedestrian operated vehicles and nine with pedestrians. The remaining collisions were with rolling stock at the Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF).

Sound Transit reported eight collisions in September 2023. There were two pedestrian collisions at Orcas Street and Pioneer Square. Both resulted in medical transport due to non-serious injuries. Five collisions were with vehicles along MLK, including two collisions at Norfolk Street – one illegal left turn, and one minor contact with an Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) street sweeper. There was also one collision during a coupling attempt at the OMF. This data underscored the need for continued work with the At Grade crossing program to partner with SDOT to enhance safety in the MLK corridor in order to decrease the types of collisions being seen. Staff would provide more detail about the work of this program over the coming months.

Sound Transit reported 21 major safety events in September 2023. Nine of these events were emergency door activations. There was also a derailment of a high rail vehicle at Walden Street. The remaining events were covered in the injuries and collision portions of the report. The uptick in safety events were largely due to an increase in emergency door activations on the light rail vehicles. This occurred when a passenger illegally triggered the emergency door release mechanism. Typically, this resulted in the passenger exiting the train into the right of way. Evacuations accounted for 44 events through September 2023, over half of the reportable event volume. In 2023, the FTA added new requirements for reporting evacuations into the right of way which resulted in many emergency door activations meeting the threshold for a major reportable event. The agency developed some mitigations to address the increases, including new covers for the door release mechanism and by adding an alarm to discourage inappropriate use. Staff would continue to report on the effectiveness of these measures as they were implemented.

Light Rail injury rates had increased steadily since 2022. This was largely driven by an increase in assaults in 2022, and an increase in collisions in 2023. Sound Transit reported 18 injuries due to assaults in 2022 and reported 15 injuries through September 2023. Sound Transit also reported 10 injuries due to collisions in 2023, four vehicular and six pedestrian, compared to four injuries in 2022. Sound Transit reported seven injuries in September 2023. Three injuries were due to assaults with a weapon – two persons attacked with a hammer, one person sprayed with a chemical irritant. Two injuries were due to collisions with pedestrians, one at Pioneer Square Station and one at Orcas Street, and one injury was caused by a collision with a vehicle at Norfolk Street – illegal left turn. One injury was caused by a pedestrian fall at the UW Station where the pedestrian tripped on a curb entering the station and broke their arm. The agency's key response to injuries was to continue strategically enhancing and deploying security staff to increase presence in the system and ability to support passengers and their safety.

Mr. Wright reviewed the six call types as an indicator of security environment which included assault, biohazard, graffiti/vandalism, medical, trespass, and unlawful transit conduct. Over the past month, there were no significant security incident increases overall, but a steady increase was observed in security incidents. The first cause was an overall increase in ridership. The agency was seeing some of the highest levels of ridership in the system and that equated to increased activity and increased incident levels. The increased ridership was met with an increase of security officers both onboard and at light rail stations. For the first time since the agency's security contract transition, the team was full staffed on the 1 Line. One area where data was also increasing was with unlawful transit conduct and trespassing incidents. The increase in trespassing incidents was in part due to installations of a temporary technology that detected trespassing at a location that had seen frequent illegal pedestrian rail crossings. While detection technology had increased the number of incidents reported, it had also allowed the ability to increase security response to the illegal activity. The increase in unlawful transit conduct was largely due to an incremental seasonal increase in activity across the service that was reflected in the data. This included more people moving indoors as the weather cooled and became wetter and increased activity due to school being back in session.

Board member Frizzell asked if the higher increase in incidents was related to a higher presence of security. Mr. Wright confirmed that was correct.

Board member Roscoe asked for clarification on the relation of school being back in session and higher number of incidents. Mr. Wright explained that was an observed seasonal trending increase related to unlawful transit such as radios being played on the systems.

Passenger Impact Portfolio Plan (Future Ready Work)

Pamela Wrenn, Deputy Project Director of Service Delivery, provided the report. The switch machine repairs project was planned for November 2023 and was previously done during nighttime single tracking starting at 9:00 p.m. Due to further efficiencies, Sound Transit and King County Metro (KCM) planned to complete the remaining switch replacement efforts during non-revenue service hours resulting in benefits to passengers.

The combined rail replacement and bond box repair project was planned for Q1 2024. Bond box repair would fix signal boxes embedded in the tracks that were damaged by joint bus-rail operation. Rail replacement near Westlake Station would replace worn rail, resulting in reduced long-term wear on equipment and better passenger experience. The entire northbound tunnel bore would close to allow contractor access and make the bond boxes electrically safe to work with. Southbound bore would also close during the weekends only. This project was being explored for possibilities of combining with piggyback projects. 24 days of work would take place in early 2024 and include single tracking during weekdays, full tunnel closure on the weekends from Capitol Hill to SoDo stations, and single-tracking service services. The single tracking would cause 13 to 20 minute headways north and south of the closure and 25 to 30 minute headways through the closure. Every other trip would require a transfer at

the UW or Stadium stations to continue through single track operations. The benefits included working during period of lowest annual ridership, completing all work before the opening of Lynnwood Link Extension, avoiding home football games and community events, and taking advantage of craft labor on site to accelerate the work.

Ms. Wrenn shared that the work between now and Spring 2024 to integrate the Passenger Impact Portfolio Plan activity was now a regular business function. The goal was to improve processes and procedures around the types of closures through the use of agreed tools. Agency-wide and cross-agency workshops would occur in the next few months to establish concurrence on program norms and processes. Lessons learned would be incorporated to improve the ongoing process. Next steps included continued coordination of downtown tunnel single tracking and full weekend closures for combined rail replacement and bond box repair, begin planning piggyback work for Q1 impact, continuing to plan East Link Extension systems tie-in for Q3 2024, and continuing monthly reporting on service disruptions to this committee.

Chair Walker asked if projects were complete for 2023. Ms. Wrenn confirmed that was correct. Chair Walker asked if that was intended to avoid the holiday season. Ms. Wrenn replied it was typical practice to avoid the holiday season and the planning was executed to avoid that period. Chair Walker noted the helpful graphics in the presentation that showed passengers where the closures would take place and how long the headways would be.

CEO Timm commended the team on working with agency partners to execute the required switch machine repairs project to take place during non-revenue hours and also on their efforts to bundle repair work under a single disruption ahead of upcoming station openings.

Presentation on the Proposed 2024 Enhancement, State of Good Repair, Administrative, and Transit Operations Budget

Ryan Fisher, Deputy Executive Director of Financial Planning, Analysis and Budget and Jenny Stephens, Director of Financial Planning, Analysis and Budget, provided the presentation. The 2024 revenue budget was expected to grow by 8 percent over the 2023 budget with continued growth in tax revenue based, along with strong investment income. Fare revenues assumed higher ridership due to East Link Starter Line and Lynnwood Link openings. Grant revenues forecast was above the 2023 budget due to earlier than assumed appropriations for Lynnwood Link Extension. Under bond and TIFIA loan proceeds, was a draw for the entire Hilltop TIFIA loan; 2024 was the last year and the agency was able to draw down on it.

The 2024 proposed expenditures budgets were 2.2 percent, or \$69 million, lower than the 2023 budget, largely due to winding down projects in construction. The proposed modal operating budget was \$139 million higher driven by Starter Line 2 starting revenue service in Spring 2024 and Lynnwood Link Extension starting revenue service in Fall 2024. System expansion projects were lower due to a winding down of projects in construction. The projects with the largest decreases from 2023 budget to 2024 budget include Federal Way, Lynnwood Link, and Downtown Redmond Link. There was an increase for the Tacoma Dome Link Extension for the recently baselined Stride project.

More than 82 percent of funding was currently from tax revenues, while over 61 percent of spending goes to the expansion of the existing system. Staff anticipated the modal operating expenses to continually take a larger share of the overall expenses as completed expansion projects opened up into revenue service. Debt service as a percent of overall budget would continue to grow as the existing TIFIA loans over the coming years were drawn down. Mr. Fisher noted the gap between the sources and expenses would be covered by cash from existing balances in 2024.

The 2024 proposed budget for operating all four modes was \$634M. Compared to the 2023 budget of \$495M, this is an increase of \$139M or 28%. We'll go into more detail by mode in the upcoming slides, but some highlights include higher costs driven by opening Starter Line 2 in the spring and the

Lynnwood Link Extension in the fall. There are the annual increases in salaries and wages, including partner costs, as well as higher health care and insurance premiums. Also, we have planned for an increase in onboard security and mobile patrols.

For Sounder, the general increase in costs from 2021 to 2024 was mainly driven by restoring its services since the pandemic service cuts, as well as Sounder expanding its fleet from 67 vehicles in 2022 to 92 vehicles by the end of 2023. In addition, the increase in maintenance, materials and supplies from 2023 to 2024 also included the Sounder Overhaul project.

For Link, the general increase in costs from 2021 to 2024 was driven by an increase in service levels. There had been service restoration coming out of the pandemic as well as Northgate Extension beginning services in Q3 of 2021 as well as the East Link Starter Line and the Lynnwood Extension openings in 2024. For maintenance, materials, and supplies, there was a small decrease in 2023 due to an adjustment to move prior year ORCA project related costs from operating expense and in 2024 there will be vehicle overhauls as well as increase in service levels for janitorial services and vertical transportation maintenance services. For security and safety, the increase in 2024 was driven by the new service openings as well as an increase in onboard security and mobile patrols from current levels. Across the modes, safety would be increasing onboard security going from 22 transit safety officers in 2023 to 56 in 2024, as well as from 6 mobile patrols in 2023 to 15 in 2024.

For Tacoma Link, the general increase in costs from 2021 to 2024 was driven by inflation as well as the Hilltop Extension opening in September 2023. Tacoma Link was the only mode operated and maintained by Sound Transit staff and this was reflected in the salaries and benefits cost category. The agency grew from having 31 employees at the beginning of 2021 to budgeting for 61 employees in 2024. Aside from Tacoma Link headcounts, other drivers for the increase in salaries and benefits included an average of 7.8 percent in annual cost inflation as well as Operations filling more of their support roles. There were some purchased transportation costs even though Tacoma Link was operated by Sound Transit staff, and that was for bus bridging which was needed during service disruptions and for providing paratransit services, which the agency wasn't required to provide until Hilltop Extension went into service and was why the costs started up in 2023.

For ST Express, purchased transportation made up the majority of the operating costs. In 2024, purchased transportation accounted for 87 percent of ST Express' total costs. It decreased in 2022 in line with lower platform hours and since then had grown in anticipation of the operator shortages easing. For maintenance, materials, and supplies there was a cost uptick in 2024 as service levels were increased for janitorial services and vertical transportation maintenance services. For security and safety, the increase in 2024 was driven by increases in onboard security and mobile patrols from current levels.

Platform hours, which accounted for revenue service, deadhead, and layover hours, had grown across modes since 2021, due to service restoration coming out of the pandemic and new service openings on Link and Tacoma Link. Service increases on ST Express and Link were offset by significant operator shortages from 2021 to 2023. The service plan for 2024 budget anticipated easing in the operator shortage and significant openings in Link Lines 1 and 2.

Non-system expansion projects are made up of three project types: State of Good Repair, Enhancements, and Administrative. And in 2024, we will have 135 active projects and this chart shows those broken out by mode.

The proposed budget for 2024 was \$307 million, which was 17 percent higher than the 2023 budget. The largest increases came from the Kinkisharyo Light Rail Vehicle (LRV) Systems Upgrade project, Souder Vehicle Overhaul, and the Information Technology Program.

The Systemwide 2024 budget supported all modes. \$207 million was budgeted in 2024 to support 66 projects. Under the Administrative category, \$145 million was to fund the agency administrative

operating program. This was mostly made up of agency's general and administrative expenses such as Finance, Information Technology (IT), Communications, Marketing and Engagement, and so forth. that would eventually get capitalized with projects once assets went into service and \$14 million was budgeted for the IT Program to complete various systems implementation and integration projects such as the Operations Performance Reporting. Under the State of Good Repair category, \$8 million was budgeted for the IT Tech Infrastructure project to upgrade the majority of servers in datacenters and upgrade network equipment within the Link network and \$6 million was budgeted for the Vertical Conveyance Program to assess and design the replacement elevators at Auburn, Kent and Everett stations. Under the enhancement category, \$12 million was budgeted for the Portfolio Services Office's Programmatic Work to complete efforts that would benefit all projects such as creating and updating technical standards and standard drawings and updating the Project Control Policies and Procedures. \$5 million was budgeted for the Digital Passenger Information System to develop and test software and install digital signage on modes and stations.

For Link, \$58 million had been budgeted in 2024 to support 49 projects. Under the State of Good Repair category, \$13 million was budgeted for the Kinkisharyo LRV Systems Upgrade project to review the final design package and to inspect and accept the delivery of the first car. \$8 million was budgeted for the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel Capital Improvements project to continue construction activities upon ownership of the tunnel such as assessing the Power System, Fire Alarm, Station and Tunnel Structures, and Rail Replacement and making improvements where needed. \$4M was budgeted for the ST1 LRV Auxiliary Power Supply Equipment Overhaul project to issue Notice to Proceed and complete design work so that the agency could upgrade and replace obsolete ST1 equipment. Under the Enhancement category, \$4 million was budgeted for the Operations and Maintenance Facility Security Enhancement project to design and begin construction on the guard booth, make curb and parking lot modifications, and install CCTV and motion activated perimeter lighting. \$4 million was budgeted for the Link At-Grade project to review at grade crossing and research and design mitigation treatments to align with current standards. \$3 million was budgeted for the SeaTac Airport Second Elevator project to complete the procurement process and to receive permits to begin construction on a second elevator at the east side of the SeaTac/Airport Station pedestrian bridge.

For Sounder, \$11 million had been budgeted in 2024 to support 8 projects. Under the State of Good Repair category, \$9 million was budgeted for the Sounder Vehicle Overhaul Program to overhaul 12 cars and to rebuild 11 Head-End Power engines, which would be done in rotation. Under the Enhancement category, \$292,000 was budgeted for the Sounder At-Grade project to conduct diagnostic analyses and conceptual engineering for improvements identified at-grade crossings with safety issues.

Ms. Stephens reviewed the total authorized project allocation within the Transit Improvement Plan for 135 projects. The majority, or 79 percent, of these allocation, support systemwide projects. In particular, \$1.8 billion for the Agency Administrative Operating program which was made up of the agency's general and administrative expenses that would be capitalized with projects once they went into service and \$95 million for the IT Program to support agencywide hardware and software technologies.

Ms. Stephens reviewed a chart that showcased the changes proposed to the 2023 adopted Transit Improvement Plan to get to the 2024 proposed authorized allocation. The agency started with \$2.8 billion authorized under the 2023 adopted TIP. Eight new projects were added, totaling \$21 million changes to 33 existing projects added another \$200 million. Partially offsetting those were 6 projects that closed, decreasing the authorized allocation by \$12 million to arrive at the 2024 proposed TIP amount of \$3.0 billion.

The committee would consider a budget recommendation and approval at the December 2023 meetings.

Board member Roscoe asked for clarification on what staff meant by "total since beginning of project". Ms. Stephens replied the transit improvement plan included costs for all active projects and listed total

authorized project allocation which meant that it would show what was spent under each project since that projects inception through how much the agency had included for future costs. Board member Roscoe referenced slide 20 of the presentation. The slide showed a snapshot of active projects and there would be completed projects that were not reflected in the slide. Ms. Stephens confirmed that was correct.

Board member Roscoe asked what it meant to capitalize when projects were operational. Ms. Stephens clarified that they were not expense type of expenditures and that once a system expansion project was completed the administrative cost types would then be capitalized with the system expansion projects with each individual project.

Chair Walker asked for more information on the high estimates for purchased transportation related to ST Express and if that included drivers. Ms. Stephens replied that on ST Express, Sounder, and Link, purchased transportation costs were to pay for operators and mechanics that support those modes. However, on Tacoma Link, operators and mechanic costs were reflected under salaries and benefits because they were Sound Transit staff. Chair Walker asked where light rail vehicle purchases would fall. Ms. Stephens replied they would fall under projects where vehicle purchases were made then capitalized.

Chair Walker asked if Sound Transit ran the paratransit portion or if it was contracted out. Ms. Stephens replied that expense was reflected under purchased transportation.

Chair Walker asked if the ST Express service platform hour growth figures grew because the agency believed to retain drivers for that service. Ms. Stephens confirmed that was correct.

Chair Walker asked if the enhancement budget for a SeaTac airport second elevator was in any way related to the operations of route 574. Mr. Arnold replied that there was only one SeaTac elevator and this project was put in place to have a redundant elevator so there was access to the ground level ST Express and Rapid Ride routes. Chair Walker asked if once this enhancement was completed then the boarding location for route 574 would be moved so that all access was at one location. Mr. Arnold replied that was the goal and was the first phase in the project and would then work with partners towards realigning service in that area.

Chair Walker asked if the \$5.9 million for Vertical Conveyance Program listed for State of Good Repair was what the committee recently voted on for Vertical Conveyance maintenance. Suraj Shetty, Executive Director of Operations, replied that the administrative and engineering portion of that project was what was voted on recently by the committee and the other part was continued work towards that program.

Chair Walker asked if the \$9.4 million for Sounder Vehicle Overhaul Program listed for State of Good Repair included or part of Sounder South project that had been discussed and was currently in its public engagement phase. Mr. Arnold replied it was separate and this was focused on ensuring the vehicles ran properly. Chair Walker asked if once the Sounder South project was moving forward, if this overhaul program would proactively prepare for that and maintain the vehicles. Mr. Arnold replied that if there was a decision to lengthen the platform for that capital project so there was more capacity during the current service, that project would then identify the need for more train capacity that the agency does not have at the moment. Mr. Shetty added that the difference between Sounder and Link was that every Link car could be powered on its own but there were fewer Sounder train locomotives that drag the remaining cars which was part of the overhaul and in critical condition.

Board member Roscoe thanked Chair Walker for rising the question regarding route 574 bus route and asked if there would be one other bus line that would go near the international arrivals at SeaTac or if there would be a consolidation of all public transit that was intermixed with hotel coaches and the sort. Mr. Arnold replied that moving forward, all transit at the International Boulevard side of the terminal

would all be recalibrated near the Link station so there was a shorter distance between those connections.

Board member Roscoe asked if there were any predicted ridership changes on any modes when that transition would occur. Mr. Arnold replied that analysis hadn't been explored yet and those conversations would be more prevalent once the vertical conveyance was established.

Chair Walker reminded the committee they would forward the budget for approval at its December 7, 2023, meeting and to provide questions to staff ahead of that meeting.

Briefing on Link fares and fare structure

Alex Krieg, Director of Access, Integration and Station Area Planning, provided the presentation. The current existing adult Link fares ranged from \$2.25 to \$3.50 which was determined using the base fare of \$2.25 plus \$0.05 per mile charge rounded to the nearest \$0.25. The fare change and structure was being considered due to the last fare change on Link occurring in 2015, an expanded system would result in a larger distance-based fare table and more fare rates, and staff received interest from Board members to explore a flat fare structure. Mr. Krieg displayed a table of existing fares across the Sound Transit district with the Sound Transit fares alongside partner agencies' fares. He also displayed the current Link fare table for adult fares across the Link line and the Link fare table for adult fares after ST2 projects opened with no changes to the current fare structure or rates. Mr. Krieg reviewed how Sound Transit Link compared to peer transit agencies with light rail, what their fare structure was, if they offered income-qualifying reduced fares, and if they capped fares. A presentation on these comparisons was provided earlier in the year. Since then, Tri-Met in Portland has increased their adult fares from \$2.50 to \$2.80 and RTD in Denver went from a zone-based fare to a flat fare with airport surcharge and reduced each of their fare rates and would go into effect early 2024.

Mr. Krieg reviewed the fare structures for distance-based and flat fare considerations. Distance-based fares required passengers to tap on and tap off, and if passengers did not tap off, they were charged the highest fare from their originating station. Flat fare considerations listed one fare for all rides which was simpler to understand and budget for, flat fares required passengers to only tap on, and simplified fare structure allowed for easier potential transition to fare capping.

54 percent of Link fare boardings in 2022 were paid by passengers that had a reduced fare or an employer-provided ORCA card. Mr. Krieg noted this group of passengers would not be impacted by fare changes since there would not be a change to reduced fares or subsidy programs with employers. 46 percent of Link boardings in 2022 were paid with the adult fare using an ORCA e-purse, pass products, or via ticket vending machines. This group would see impacts of the fare change and influenced the agency's engagement approach.

The focus of engagement was whether to maintain a distance-based fare or adopt a flat fare. The change would only affect adult fares. The fare rates under consideration for distance-based fare would increase base fare by \$0.25 or \$0.50. Flat fares would consider \$3.00, \$3.25, or \$3.50. Engagement would also seek input related to simplicity, affordability, and impact on a passenger's use of light rail based on a change to Link fare structure. No changes were being proposed to other fare categories such as low-income fare, senior, disabled, or youth fares.

The engagement period took place from September 25, 2023 to October 22, 2023. Key tactics included an online open house, a passenger survey, engagement with community-based organizations, targeted focus groups, and street teams to drive survey participation. Engagement efforts targeted areas and populations likely to be most impacted by a Link fare change, parking program expansion, or both. Online survey results was not truly representative of the rider population and not every entry included an answer regarding the demographic choice.

With the question of which fare structure option passengers and the public prefer, overall there were 3,841 respondents and option 1 (updated distance-based fare) received 50.14 percent of votes and

option 2 (new flat rate) received 49.86 percent of votes. 2,261 respondents were passengers that paid adult fares and did not have employer-paid ORCA cards – 52 percent of this group chose option 1 and 48 percent chose option 2. 2,296 respondents were passengers that rode light rail at least once a week and 53 percent of this group chose option 1 and 47 percent chose option 2. The data was also broken down by county. 51 percent of King County respondents chose option 1, 45 percent of Snohomish County respondents chose option 1, and 60 percent of Pierce County respondents chose option 1. Mr. Krieg reiterated that not all respondents provided a zip code to place them in a demographic region.

51 percent of passengers using existing stations chose option 1 and 47 percent of passengers planning to use ST2 stations chose option 1. Passengers based on income levels showed closely divided percentages between the two options. Passengers based on racial identity showed more in favor of option 1. Mr. Krieg noted that data comparisons for income levels and racial identity also received fewer respondents and therefore had lower respondent counts to use for percentages. The survey asked whether participants agreed or disagreed with statements for a distance-based or flat fare structure. Mr. Krieg shared the results for each statement.

Staff was working to summarize themes from information sessions, focus groups, community-based organizations, and the 1,600 open-ended comments received in the passenger survey. Initial themes that emerged included considering a zone-based fare structure, fare rates under consideration were too high, or fares should be free, and focus on enforcing fare payment compliance before raising fares.

Next steps included a public hearing on November 16, 2023 as well as briefing the Board at its November 16, 2023 meeting. The Rider Experience and Operations Committee would take potential action Link fare changes at its December 7, 2023 meeting and the Board would take potential action at its December 15, 2023 meeting.

Board member Frizzell asked about fare capping and what other municipalities or transit agencies were doing and what was the amount of fare capping and relationship to a single ticket. Mr. Krieg replied that fare capping was not present in this region and other regions where fare capping was present it could vary in ways such as daily, weekly, or monthly depending on what the agency was trying to achieve. Mr. Krieg offered to provide more data if there was interest in receiving it. Board member Frizzell showed interest in receiving more information on what other agencies were doing.

Board member Frizzell shared the need for signage to tap off and expressed a number of riders had no knowledge of needing to tap off. Mr. Arnold shared that the Downtown Seattle station had more signage along with tactile strips to indicate when you enter and exit to tap on and tap off. The rest of the system was projected to complete by March 2024. Board member Frizzell shared her personal experience when searching for tap on and tap off signage and offered suggestions with message placements.

Chair Walker asked if the determination of fare capping was to be made in conjunction with this fare rate and structure decision. Mr. Krieg replied that was not under consideration at the moment given the multi-agency environment complexities. A flat fare structure to set the cap would be more simple administratively whereas a distance-based fare with eight different rates would be complex and would require sensitivity in discovery across the subareas. Mr. Krieg noted they were prepared to investigate and report back on how to implement fare capping should the Board request it. Chair Walker showed interest in exploring those options.

Chair Walker asked if it was easier to apply fare capping with a flat fare because the agency would think of how many rides someone could take in a day versus the mileage for distance based. Mr. Krieg there was a back end administrative portion to the ease of knowing when the cap was reached based on the various configurations that gets a passenger to the threshold. Mr. Arnold added if there was a flat fare of \$3.00 and a cap of \$6.00, that would equal two trips total. If it was distance-based, two short trips of both \$2.50 would enable an additional trip to reach the \$6.00 cap therefore it differed and created complexities for passengers to understand when they met the capped price.

Board member Roscoe shared appreciation for the analysis and looked forward to reviewing the in-depth analysis of written comments received.

Chair Walker asked what the topic was for the November 16, 2023 public hearing. Mr. Krieg replied it would cover both options and was another opportunity for public to provide public comment. Chair Walker asked if that meant the Board would receive the analysis for both options by the December 7, 2023 meeting but would not include public input on the final proposal. Mr. Krieg confirmed that was correct and noted staff was in the process of analyzing all of the engagement information and more information related to the key words in the guiding framework would be brought to the Board for further discussion. Chair Walker asked if staff would have more direction by the December 7, 2023 committee meeting. Mr. Krieg confirmed that was correct.

Executive session – None.

Other business – None.

Next meeting

Thursday, December 7, 2023
1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
Ruth Fisher Boardroom and Virtually via WebEx

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:44 p.m.



Kristina Walker

Rider Experience and Operations Committee Chair

ATTEST:



Kathryn Flores
Board Administrator

APPROVED on December 7, 2023, JG.