



Summary Minutes

Rider Experience and Operations Committee Meeting January 18, 2024

Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Vice Chair Prince 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
(A) Kristina Walker, Tacoma Councilmember	(P) Ed Prince, Renton Councilmember

Board Members	
(P) Christine Frizzell, Lynnwood Mayor	(P) Dave Upthegrove, King County Council Chair
(P) Kim Roscoe, Fife Mayor	(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.

Welcoming Interim CEO Goran Sparrman

Vice Chair Prince welcomed Interim CEO Goran Sparrman to his first Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting.

CEO Report

Interim CEO Goran Sparrman shared a few introductory words.

Deputy CEO Russ Arnold provided the CEO Report.

Lynnwood Link Service Planning

The agency continued to work with Community Transit and King County Metro on opportunities to improve transit service in the corridor through added bus service as well as opportunities for more light rail capacity in the 1 Line corridor. This enabled the agency to deliver reliable and expanded services.

Passenger Information Management System (PIMS) signs update

Staff was advancing the next phase of the PIMS project and began replacing the legacy digital signs on the 1 Line with new, modern displays capable of a much-improved passenger information experience. Riders

would see the first new signs at Columbia City and Othello stations completed later this month, followed by ongoing work through 2024 and into 2025. The majority of this work was currently being planned to be completed during non-revenue hours which was causing the extended implementation schedule; however, the team was actively working together to see where this work could be bundled with other required state of good repair service disruptions to accelerate delivery.

ST Express Service Levels

Earlier this fall, the Board adopted a “rail only” service plan for 2024 and noted staff would return to the Board in early 2024 with ST Express recommendations using the latest operator availability data from agency partners.

Each of the three partners who operate service on the agency’s behalf, King County Metro, Community Transit and Pierce Transit, had different financial and operating constraints. Community Transit operated Sound Transit service through a third-party provider and King County Metro made substantial service reductions in September to their service which resulted in performance improvements for Sound Transit performance. Pierce Transit, however, had been challenged primarily by ongoing staffing challenges and had now provided Sound Transit with a service reduction target of approximately 10 percent.

The reductions would be implemented at the March 2024 service change and are anticipated to trigger major service changes, which would require Board authorization of the new service levels to decrease daily missed trips and to increase reliability of service until service could be fully restored in collaboration with the operating partners.

Public comment

Vice Chair Prince 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:

Lisa Pfeiffer
Will Sladich
Sam Luikens
Joe Kunzler
Unnamed commenters

The following people provided virtual comments:

Stephen Fesler
Joe Kunzler
Zakariya Osman

There were no in-person comments submitted.

Business Items

For Committee final action

December 7, 2023, Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting minutes

It was moved by Board member Roscoe, seconded by Board member Frizzell and carried by the unanimous vote of all committee members present that the minutes of the December 7, 2023, Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting 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. The monthly report covered the month of October 2023. For ST Express, the highest average weekday boardings occurred in October 2023 out of any month since the start of the pandemic. Average weekday boardings increased by five percent since September 2023. For Link customer comments, there were 5.7 complaints for every 100,000 boardings. Track maintenance which led to service interruptions and maintenance was highlighted as a driving force for many complaints. Tacoma Link (T Line) had an improvement in target rates for On-Time performance and Operated as Scheduled numbers.

Mr. Wright reviewed security data and how security risks were being mitigated and reminded the committee of the increase in security contractors from one to four contractors. For ST Express, current year rate of collisions, rate of safety events, and rate of injuries was well above the three-year average.

For reportable safety events, 22 out of 28 were collisions through October 2023. Sound Transit bus collisions hit a peak of five vehicle collisions in April 2023 and four vehicle collisions in August 2023. There was nothing particularly unique about either surge, the incidents involved other vehicles either directly hitting the coach or pushing another car into the coach. Most of the injuries for the 2023 year resulted from collisions, 12 of the 16 reportable injuries. Mr. Wright noted five injuries occurred in August 2023 due to multiple passengers in the passenger vehicles involved. The agency has seen the rate of injuries increase compared to the last two years due to a small increase in collisions and reduced vehicle mileage through October 2023. Staff would continue monitoring the rate for the next two months.

Other safety events this year have included transit worker and passenger assaults and a slip and fall, these also contributed to the injury rate. Overall, rate and volume of safety events was higher than the last two years. It was expected the rate and volume would remain elevated after including the final two months of data for 2023.

For Sounder, the current year data for rate of collisions, rate of safety events, and rate of injuries showed a small decline from the last three-year average. There were two reported safety events through October 2023. January 2023 included an assault on a transit worker in which the individual was transported for treatment from an assault that occurred inside Everett station. The June 2023 event was another assault on a transit worker and the security officer was transported for treatment.

For the T Line, current year numbers for rate of collisions and rate of safety events showed a slight decline from the average of three years. The number of reportable injuries for this year and last year had remained the same however based on the exceedingly low average of the previous three years, the injury rate was above the target. There were collisions in July and September 2023 which involved vehicles (one Pierce transit coach and one car) that were not fully in the turn lanes, leaving a portion of the vehicle bodies in the dynamic envelope of the approaching T line trains. The March collision involved a vehicle making an illegal left turn in front of the train, resulting in a collision. The driver of the vehicle was transported for unknown injuries.

Passenger Impact Portfolio Plan (Future Ready Work)

Pamela Wrenn, Deputy Project Director of Service Delivery, provided the report. On January 13, 2024, multiple teams began work on maintenance in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel (DSTT) to improve safety, reduce wear on train equipment, improve signal operations and improve ride quality. On the evening of January 13, 2024, the entire northbound bore of the tunnel was shut down and would remain de-powered until February 4, 2024 to provide the contractors with safe access to the tunnel and make the equipment electrically safe to work on. The secondary power to emergency tunnel systems was turned off for the same reason, which was made possible by the completion of repairs to the main power

to tunnel systems in the first two weeks of the year. The southbound side of the tunnel was also shut down during that weekend to make full use of this work period, which led to a full closure of the tunnel. The weekend full closures were allowing multiple specialty teams to work side-by-side as they overhauled all the sixty bond boxes in the tunnel. Following the power shutdown, large amounts of equipment and materials were mobilized into the tunnel as the construction teams started cutting concrete and began the process of replacing a large section of curved rail near Westlake.

Multiple projects also began to perform piggyback work during this service disruption to make full use of the time the tunnel would be closed. For example, the Passenger Information Management System (PIMS) team was able to start work on upgrading passenger information signs and associated cables in the International District Station. The Bird Mitigation Project also started work at International District Station. The service disruption team worked to compare the detailed plans and schedules of the piggyback projects, aiming to maximize the number of projects working at one time without conflicts. An event management team and escalation plan were in place in case conflicts between projects or between projects and operations emerged as construction proceeded.

Service to passengers was severely impacted during this time. Bus shuttle service operated on 10 to 15 minute headways between Sodo and Capitol Hill Stations during the first weekend of the service disruption. Link service on either end of the downtown core ran every 15 minutes. This service model would be used every weekend until the end of the work, including the last weekend of February 3 and 4, 2024. A joint Sound Transit and King County operations team continued to closely manage operations, deployment of front-line staff to support passengers, and contingency plans for bus service during inclement weather.

On weekdays, single tracking led to trains operating at much longer headways in the tunnel. Service was being provided every 26 to 30 minutes between UW and Stadium Stations. This service model was due to the need to shut down power to the entire northbound track, which prohibited the better service that could be achieved by meeting trains at Pioneer Square. On either side of the tunnel, turnback train shuttles had been providing service with greater frequency. Service was running at 13 to 15 minute headways on these segments to the north and south of the single tracking operation. During PM peak commute times, platforms in downtown stations were very crowded, and trains were full of passengers. This has led to increased dwell times as passengers exit and enter full trains, temporarily increasing headways beyond the typical 26 to 30 minutes in the single tracking segment.

Another source of delays had been small incidents, such as a crossing-gate malfunction, which occurred on January 17, 2024 at the Royal Brougham intersection just prior to the evening peak commute. This malfunction took about 10 minutes to resolve by standby maintenance staff. During typical operations, such events would not cause much impact to operations, but due to the current complex operational plan, even a small delay, such as this one, would lead to cascading impacts to headways that take time to recover.

Despite the longer headways, passengers boarding at one end of the system or the other could travel the entire length of the system without transfer. Passengers who choose to board the next train, regardless of destination, may require a transfer to travel through. A major PIMS upgrade late in 2023 enabled the overhead signs in each station to display the destination of each train, so passengers could board the correct train for their destination.

Staff committed to providing as much communication and mitigation during this upcoming event within the operating constraints. A customized Passenger Care plan was put in place, which included revamping some visual assets to help passengers understand the complex service plan. Social media ads were also deployed in the top six major languages within the Sound Transit district. Accurate data about the disruption was delivered to apps such as OneBusAway, Google Maps, and the Transit app. These planning tools were showing the custom schedule, including which trains end at the start of the single tracking segment and which trains continued through. Staff was excited to provide more

stakeholder outreach than before. For example, the agency was putting special emphasis on staff who were assisting passengers with disabilities during this difficult period for Link service.

There were over 700 shifts of staff ambassadors working in the field to help passengers during this event. Temporary signage plans were also deployed to include a multi-language pre-closure rider alert on Sounder and Link at the end of 2023 to give passengers plenty of notice of this event. The agency also deployed and were regularly updating comprehensive signage, platform and onboard messages, and operator announcements to continuously convey to passengers the extent of the service changes and how to navigate through them.

On March 8 and 9, 2024, an 8-hour work block was required to complete work to replace electromagnetic interference hangars (EMI) hangers between UW and University District Stations. Single tracking would be used between the UW and Northgate stations on Saturday night from 10 p.m. to early Sunday morning at approximately 6 to 7 a.m. in order to accomplish this work. Multiple piggyback projects were also being considered for this time.

Staff was also working to schedule an impact which would allow the East Link project to continue the work of integrating the East Link signal system into the DSTT. Most of this work would occur during non-revenue hours but one weekend of full closure was needed to complete the tie-in and test the integrated signal system with active trains.

Ms. Wrenn noted the work presented at today's meeting was part of a larger suite of state of good repair projects being performed to keep the system operating safely and efficiently for years to come. Next steps included the safe, on-time completion of the current event, and a detailed plan for EMI hanger work in March 2024. Staff would continue to provide details on upcoming projects at each Rider Experience & Operations Committee meeting and through public communications channels.

Board member Roscoe asked if recent customer complaints were primarily due to service disruptions or lack of communication from the agency. Suraj Shetty, Executive Director of Operations, replied that it appeared the communication efforts did not match the service being delivered – for example, delayed trains causing additional crowding during peak commuting hours. Mr. Shetty reiterated the domino effect of the crossing-gate incident that Ms. Wrenn spoke to, causing for further delays on January 17, 2023. Staff was attempting new forms of communication and continuously aiming to adapt to create a better passenger experience.

Board member Roscoe asked how the modeling was not able to consider the time it took for a full train to clear out. Ms. Wrenn explained the difficulties with balancing faster headways for nearly the full day and sacrificing a comparatively smaller delay during the peak hours. Board member Roscoe suggested diving into areas of improvement with communication for all passengers. Mr. Shetty added staff ambassadors have been deployed to address as many gaps as possible.

Fare Ambassador Update

Marie Olson, Acting Chief Passenger Experience and Innovation Officer, and Maria Splaine, Manager of Fare Engagement, provided the report. Ms. Olson acknowledged Board member Roscoe's questions and concerns and noted the team would continue work towards improvement.

Ms. Splaine noted 6-month averages were reported out as the team worked through data improvements. Upcoming changes were expected to provide more granular insights along with increases in data due to hiring and procedural overhauls. Non-compliance was averaging at 14 percent and compliance was at 86 percent based on the 1.94 percent inspection rate along the entire alignment – 98.06 percent of riders were not being inspected. The overall inspection rate increased from the 1.4 percent in 2022. The ultimate target was 10 percent. As the team hired more ambassadors and improved processes, they were seeing stable increases towards the 10 percent goal. To increase productivity, the team was developing an app that would allow more accurate and concise data gathering and provide connection for ambassadors to internal safety teams.

Ms. Olson provided a year over year comparison graph and staffing and inspections correlation graph. For the staffing and inspections graph, there were lines representing inspection rates by month and bars representing staffing levels. While it was showing improvement, the program had experienced consistent attrition in the summer. This reduction in staff levels directly corresponded with a decrease in inspection rates.

Disruptions caused notable decreases in staff inspection rates. However, new procedures appeared to be mitigating their impact without sacrificing passenger support. During the Westlake disruption, 75 percent of the 378 respondents gave positive feedback for staff support. During the Royal Brougham disruption, 76 percent of the 349 respondents gave positive feedback for staff support.

With the fare policy going into effect mid-November 2023, the data provided was roughly six weeks' worth of information. Compliancy was at 87 percent with 13 percent non-compliant. Of that 13 percent, 7 percent included ID not presented passengers and the remaining 6 percent presented ID.

Ms. Splaine provided additional program updates. For staffing, hiring was ongoing through April 2024 for all positions. For platform inspections, non-revenue testing was scheduled to begin in February 2024. Fare resolutions data would be presented at the next quarterly update from staff. For East Link Starter Line, ambassadors were preparing procedures for the opening of East Link.

Board members Frizzell and Roscoe expressed the correlation graph was difficult to understand given the robust data presented. Staff provided further clarification on how to read the graph. Board member Roscoe shared support for breaking down non-compliance passengers based on ID presented or not presented.

Report on ST Express Service Reductions

Brian de Place, Director of System and Service Planning, provided the report. At the December 2023 Board meeting, the Board approved Motion No. M2023-113 which authorized temporary service reductions on ST Express service operated by Pierce Transit. The motion also required staff to report back to the Rider Experience and Operations Committee at its January 2024 meeting on details of the service reductions.

Three separate agencies provide the transportation and maintenance of the ST Express Bus service, they were Community Transit, King County Metro, and Pierce Transit. Each partner operated with an independent workforce strategy, negotiated labor agreements, benefits and pay structures, and work conditions. Sound Transit monitors service quality and determined how service would change based on staffing outlook provided by partners. All partners and the entire industry were challenged with staffing since the COVID-19 pandemic started. Most recently, Pierce Transit identified the need for reduced service levels due to these ongoing staffing challenges.

Motion No. M2023-113 authorized temporary major service changes on Pierce Transit-operated service of up to 10 percent reduction and established the following priorities: preserve key regional routes on I-5 and I-405, consistent with future High-Capacity Transit Plans, prioritize Board adopted equitable service restoration plans as identified in the 2022 Service Plan, and continue to align resources where the most riders were using service. The changes discussed would be implemented with the March 2024 service change and remain in effect until the Board adopted the 2025 ST Express service plan, which could happen as early as fall 2024. In the meantime, staff would continue to monitor service quality and staffing levels to see if further adjustments to service was required.

Aligned with the direction to preserve key regional routes and connections, Mr. de Place provided a list and map of the service that was able to be preserved even as difficult reductions were made that would have significant impacts on our passengers. That list included the 560, 574, 577, 578, 586, 592, 594, 595, and 596. Many routes had either no changes or what was defined in Board policy as minor changes.

Mr. de Place highlighted that a future Stride route from West Seattle to Bellevue was preserved. The connection to the airport from Lakewood and Tacoma was also preserved, including early morning shifts key to the economic vitality of the region. It was a route which was one of the most durable during the pandemic, specifically for essential airport workers. Service from Tacoma to the UW hospital was preserved and was critical for essential medical workers as well as those needing access to medical care and appointments – Mr. de Place noted this would be a direct 1 line trip in the future. Mid-day service between Lakewood and Seattle, and Puyallup Federal Way and Seattle was preserved.

Mr. de Place reviewed the service reductions the Board authorized. The first was where the service went and the second was how much service was deployed. He showed two routes where the route alignment was adjusted. The first change eliminated part of Route 590 north of Tacoma dome. Riders could still use Tacoma Link service to get to Tacoma Dome station and ride to downtown Seattle. While this transfer was not ideal, it allowed enough resources and prevented further service reductions across the Pierce Transit-operated ST Express system. The second was a low ridership route, a Sounder connector, that already shared a segment with a local transit route that served the same Sounder station. There was a new parking garage at Puyallup, which was not yet fully utilized. This explained why an average of three riders per trip used this service and for now they would be able to use the new parking facility or use a Pierce Transit local route. By suspending this route, it prevented further reductions on higher priority services.

Mr. de Place reviewed major reductions that were made on the amount of service that was deployed. Approximately half the trips on Route 590 were reduced, which provided key connectivity to Downtown Seattle from Tacoma. To mitigate the impact, passengers could use Sounder south and Routes 595 to get from Tacoma Dome to Downtown Seattle. The agency asked Pierce Transit, who developed the detailed schedules, to design the new schedules to provide consistent departures from Tacoma Dome along these three routes.

Service was maintained on routes where most riders were using it. Therefore, the trips that were selected for reductions had lower ridership. Midday trips, such as Federal Way to Downtown Seattle, were suspended. Riders would be able to use another route which also serviced more places in Pierce County south of Federal Way. While able to keep all-day service, riders would now experience up to 30-minute headways during the week and up to 60 minutes on Sundays. Overall, the all-day service along I-5 between Lakewood, Tacoma and Seattle was preserved, while selecting a number of low ridership trips.

Staff was preparing for implementation of these reductions in March 2024 and would continue coordinating with Pierce Transit around the readiness for the implementation. Also in March 2024, staff would return to the committee and Board to seek approval for the remainder of the 2024 ST Express Service Plan. Later in the year, staff would seek approval for the 2025 Service Plan and would have more information around Pierce Transit's staffing levels and ability to deliver reliable service as performance was monitored.

Board member Roscoe asked how routes 590 and 595 align with Sounder south and what a passenger's route would be. Mr. de Place replied that route 590 leaves Tacoma Dome every 10 minutes, Sounder departs every 20 minutes, and route 595 from Gig Harbor had about three trips during peak period. The team was researching which route 590 trips to remove while ensuring trips with route 590 and Sounder weren't scheduled to depart at the same time as opposing arrivals. Mr. de Place added Pierce Transit was currently developing the schedules and Sound Transit was waiting to receive it for review.

Report on Contract Service Provider Procurement for operations and maintenance of Stride BRT Facilities, S1, S2 and S3 Lines

Bernard van de Kamp, Program Executive of Bus Rapid Transit and Lucien Bruno, Deputy Program Executive of Bus Rapid Transit Operations, provided the report. The program was aggressively moving

forward. Overall, design was approaching 100 percent completion which was informing permitting, the acquisition of right of way, and program risks. Numerous construction agreements had been executed with partners. The program was also preparing for start-up and operations by procuring systems and other needed components. The Stride program was preparing for revenue service by establishing key goals that would drive procurements and service. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) would be a new mode of high capacity transit for Sound Transit. Staff was working to ensure the ability to monitor performance in real time and make needed adjustments. Staff was also working to ensure most efficient operations and control costs in the immediate term and adapt to needs for the longer term as it evolved.

The bus operating technology systems included Sound Transit's first computer aided dispatch (CAD)/automatic vehicle location (AVL) system which allowed for communication with dispatch, real-time arrival tracking, automatic vehicle announcements for onboard passengers, among other essential data and communication functions. The Stride operations and start up model comprised of several components such as facilities, operating systems, vehicles, and the operators and mechanics that would run the system. Early involvements improved operational readiness of Stride and Bus Base North.

Operating responsibilities from the contracted service provider included operating buses, scheduling vehicle and operator shifts, dispatch and administration of operations center, and vehicle maintenance. Sound Transit responsibilities included station and facility maintenance, oversight and management, onboard and station technology and passenger information, and fare ambassadors and security.

The contracted service provider model included ensuring flexibility for service and operations adjustments, real-time access to performance data, Sound Transit oversight and control to ensure focus on passenger experience, focused operations with operators and mechanics trained specifically to Stride's performance standards and allowing direct and daily control over Sound Transit owned systems and assets.

Example requirements for the contracted service provider performance metrics included: on-time performance at 90 percent of service on time in any given month, missed/canceled service with zero missed trips being the standard with consideration given to emergencies, mechanical failures, or other, fleet and staff availability with 90 percent fleet available for revenue service on any given day, 100 percent compliance in continuous project staffing of designated key employee positions, maintenance with all preventive maintenance schedules as required by Sound Transit would be met within required standards, cleanliness with Sound Transit verifying compliance by reviewing records and spot checks, preventable complaints with fewer than three per 1,000 boardings and response within three business days, and safety with Sound Transit verifying compliance by monitoring monthly maintenance and specific accident reports.

Next steps including releasing request for proposal in February 2024, notice to proceed in Q3 2024, Phase 1 start-up in Q3 2024 to Q4 2026, Phase 2 ramp-up in Q4 2026 to Q3 2028, and S1 and S3 service launch in Q3 2028.

Mr. van de Kamp added this was of great interest of labor to the region therefor staff coordinated closely with agency transit partners throughout this process.

Board member Roscoe shared support of the agency having control of data as an asset.

Review of 2024 Rider Experience and Operations Committee work plan

Vice Chair Prince explained the purpose of the work plan which included two main areas of committee work including transactional matters to oversee operating plans, transit services, and rider experience and topics of special interest to the committee. Any topics identified in 2023 that weren't presented were carried over to the 2024 list of special topics. He noted that it was a working document and committee members were able to suggest additional topics at any point during the year.

Board member Frizzell recognized the absence of a follow-up report on sanitation conditions of the coaches as well as vertical conveyance reports.

Board member Roscoe asked about new committee members being appointed to the Board. Katie Flores, Board Administrator, replied that new members from North and East King County would be attending the January 25, 2024 Board meeting.

Executive session – None.

Other business – None.

Next meeting

Thursday, February 1, 2024
1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
Ruth Fisher Boardroom and Virtually via WebEx

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:18 p.m.



Kristina Walker
Rider Experience and Operations Committee Chair

ATTEST:



Kathryn Flores
Board Administrator

APPROVED on February 1, 2024, JG.