SOUNDTRANSIT

Summary Minutes

Rider Experience and Operations Committee Meeting
November 7, 2024

Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Committee 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/meeting-videos.

Roll call of members

Chair	Vice Chair
(P) Kristina Walker, Tacoma Councilmember	(P) Ed Prince, Renton Council President

Board Members	
(P) Angela Birney, Redmond Mayor	(A) Dave Upthegrove, King County Council Chair
(P) Christine Frizzell, Lynnwood Mayor	(A) Peter von Reichbauer, King County Councilmember
(P) Kim Roscoe, Fife Mayor	(P) Girmay Zahilay, King County Council Vice Chair

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

Report of the Chair

None.

CEO Report

Interim CEO Sparrman provided the CEO Report.

Updates on Operational Challenges

CEO Sparrman reported on recent operational challenges on Link over the last few weeks. He noted the frustration caused by disruption, particularly to new riders who are utilizing the newly opened Lynnwood Link extension.

CEO Sparrman highlighted the current work underway to identify and address the root causes behind recent disruptions, noting that DCEOs Moises Gutierrez and Russ Arnold are working in coordination between Agency Oversight and Service Delivery, respectively to bring a more detailed report and presentation to the Committee in December.

Activation Update

CEO Sparrman noted that the Agency Oversight department is launching a detailed agency risk assessment to evaluate the delivery of upcoming openings ahead of the 2026 World Cup. He highlighted that this work is taking place at both the project and program levels to closely monitor progress and performance.

CEO Sparrman noted the Downtown Redmond Link Extension is still undergoing systems integration testing and that he has made the decision to wait on establishing a window for opening pending further information from the project team.

CEO Sparrman provided updates on the East Link Extension, highlighting a planned service disruption from November 8-10, which will begin tie-in work between the 1 & 2-lines. He also noted that further disruptions are planned to complete this work, which will be covered in the Passenger Impact Program report to the Committee.

At-Grade Crossing System-Wide Master Plan Update

CEO Sparrman reported that staff is hard at work completing the full safety master plan, highlighting that due to time constraints, the Rainier Valley brief scheduled at the October Board meeting was not given. CEO Sparrman noted that a full, in-depth presentation will be given at the November Board meeting, covering both the Rainier Valley and Systemwide efforts to address safety concerns at at-grade crossings.

Public comment

Committee 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 submitted written comments:

Sonia Anderson
Eileen

The following person provided virtual comments:

Stephen Fesler

There were no in-person public comments given.

Business Items

For Committee final action

October 3, 2024, Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting minutes

It was moved by Board member Birney, seconded by Committee Vice Chair Prince, and carried by the unanimous vote of all committee members present that the minutes of the October 3, 2024, Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting be approved as presented.

Motion No. M2024-72: Recommending that the portions of the Proposed 2025 Budget and Transit Improvement Plan reviewed by the Rider Experience and Operations Committee, including the revisions to the Proposed 2025 Budget and Transit Improvement Plan in Attachment A, be forwarded by the Finance and Audit Committee to the Board with a do-pass recommendation.

Ryan Fisher, Finance Executive Director, and Jenny Stephens, Financial Planning Analysis and Budget Director, provided the presentation on the committee's portion of the 2025 proposed budget.

Mr. Fisher noted the areas of the budget that fall under the committee's purview: Transit operations, enhancement projects, state of good repair (SOGR) projects, administrative projects, and other expenditures. He described the projected revenues for the 2025 budget cycle, noting decreased revenue from grants and investments due to the completion of ST2 projects and lowering interest rates, respectively. He also noted a significant revenue increase due to large drawdowns of TIFIA loans, accompanied by small increases in fare and tax revenues.

Mr. Fisher provided additional information on a budget revision for the Project Management Information System (PMIS), which will provide streamlined project reporting and tracking. He also noted that this system will help ensure consistent application of project tools across the entire agency. Mr. Fisher then provided an overview of projected 2025 expenditures within the committee's purview: An increase of 20% to $760 million in modal operations due to a full year of Lynnwood Link and East Link Starter Line operations, the opening of the Downtown Redmond Link extension and full East Link; an increase of 71% to $206 million for service projects, which includes SOGR, enhancement, and administrative projects including the PMIS; an increase of 0.3% to $141 for administrative support; and an increase of 13% to $61 million for other expenditures, which mainly consists of agency contingency.

Ms. Stephens went into further detail of each section of these expenditures. For modal operations, she noted that expenses are spread with Link being 57% of expenditures, ST Express at 25%, Sounder at 35%, and Tacoma Link at 3%. She also highlighted the historical and projected revenue service hours by mode, noting a large increase in Link service hours while other modes see modest growth or maintained service hours. Additional information on the sources of increases were also provided: Link and ST Express saw significant increases from purchased transportation services, Sounder saw increases in maintenance and operating projects, and Tacoma Link saw increases due to salaries and benefits along with operating projects and administrative support.

Ms. Stephens also provided detail on the other expenditures, noting that $19.9 million was dedicated to amortization and interest payments on lease type arrangements, $14 million for tax collection and other fees, $0.7 million for non-operating expenses, and $26.6 million in agency contingency funds.

Ms. Stephens provided further information on service delivery projects, noting that there are over 130 currently active, which represent $206 million or 7% of the 2025 budget. She noted that 62% of project expenditures are for systemwide SOGR, enhancement, and administrative projects; 31% are for Link specific projects, and 7% for Sounder specific projects. She provided further detail on systemwide projects, highlighting that each subcategory's expenses are about equally split across 62 active projects. She also noted that Link specific project expenditures are 58% SOGR and 47% enhancements across 50 currently active projects.

Ms. Stephens gave information on updates to the 2025 Transit Improvement plan, noting that the previously noted projects and expenditures are being reflected in these updates.

Committee Chair Walker asked whether funds allocated to service disruptions covered passenger communications and bus bridges, or if those funds were dedicated to other parts of disruptions. Ms. Stephens replied that the funds cover both aspects, and noted that depending on the specific item, expenditures may be reflected in salaries and benefits, operating projects, or elsewhere.

It was moved by Committee Vice Chair Prince, seconded by Board member Birney, and carried by the unanimous vote of all committee members present that Motion No. M2024-72 be approved as presented.

Motion No. M2024-73: Authorizing the chief executive officer to allow the Pierce County ballot drop box to remain located at 9201 Sky Island Dr. E. Bonney Lake, WA 98391.

Jason Heaverlo, Senior Leasing Document Coordinator, provided the presentation for Motion No. M2024-73.

It was moved by Committee Vice Chair Prince, seconded by Board member Frizzell, and carried by the unanimous vote of all committee members present that Motion No. M2024-73 be approved as presented.

Motion No. M2024-74: Authorizing the chief executive officer to execute an agreement with Verizon for a permanent easement for a propane tank for a total authorized amount of $74,900 being paid to Sound Transit.

Jason Heaverlo, Senior Leasing Document Coordinator, provided the presentation for Motion No. M2024-74.

It was moved by Committee Vice Chair Prince, seconded by Board member Birney, and carried by the unanimous vote of all committee members present that Motion No. M2024-74 be approved as presented.

For Recommendation to the Board

Motion No. M2024-75: Authorizing the chief executive officer to execute an amendment to extend the existing Commuter Rail Rolling Stock Maintenance Agreement with the National Railroad Passenger Corporation for the continued maintenance of Sounder locomotives and cars, including the cost of fuel, in an amount not to exceed $29,785,893 for a new total authorized agreement amount not to exceed $386,929,580.

Martin Young, Commuter Rail Operations Deputy Director, and Paul Denison, Transportation and Maintenance Deputy Executive Director, provided the presentation on Motion No. M2024-75.

Board member Frizzell asked for additional context on the previous amendments and the timeline of the amendment proposed in Motion No. M2024-75. Mr. Young replied that traditionally the original amendments would be a multi-year agreement with multiple extension options, but that this approach was not currently possible due to staff limitations at Amtrak. As such, this amendment would only be for an 11-month extension, with the plan to return to the committee with another amendment in 2025 that would follow the approach of previous agreements.

Board member Roscoe asked if there were steps that could be taken or that were already included in the agency's legislative agenda or elsewhere that could assist in the relationship between Sound Transit and Amtrak, pertaining to maintenance and reliability issues with Sounder. CEO Sparrman noted that the work Sound Transit conducts with Amtrak would not require intervention at the legislative level and highlighted that this agreement would assist in the relationship due to increased reporting and transparency requirements as part of the amendment.

It was moved by Committee Vice Chair Prince, seconded by Board member Birney, and carried by the unanimous vote of all committee members present that Motion No. M2024-75 be forwarded to the Board with a do-pass recommendation.

Reports to the Committee

Passenger Impact Program

Pamela Wrenn, Service Delivery Deputy Project Director, provided the report.

Ms. Wrenn provided updates on upcoming work requiring service disruptions: Phase 1 of 2 Line integration work scheduled for Q4 of 2024, Phase 2 scheduled for Q1 of 2025, as well as a disruption planned for early December to repair the Overhead Catenary System near UW station.

Ms. Wrenn further elaborated that the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel (DSTT) would be closed from 10 p.m. on November 8, 2024, until the start of service on November 11, 2024, to complete Phase 1 work. A Bus Bridge will be put into effect during this weekend to assist riders travelling through downtown Seattle.

Ms. Wrenn highlighted that the work near UW would result in single tracking between U-District Station and Capitol Hill Station on December 7th and 8th. She also noted that a bus bridge that serves the same stations would be provided to assist with crowding.

Ms. Wrenn noted that Phase 2 work will result in three full weekend closures of the DSTT: January 10th to January 12th, with a bus bridge running from Westlake to SODO; January 17th to January 19th, with a bus bridge running from Capitol Hill to SODO; and a third disruption in February with dates and times to be determined.

Ms. Wrenn also provided information on work being discussed for Q1 2025: the installation of roofing materials on NE 130th Infill Station, with specific dates and times still being determined.

Board member Birney asked for clarity on the effectiveness of current communication channels for disruptions. Deputy CEO Russ Arnold responded that the agency uses multiple tools, including signage, rider email and text alerts, social media posts, press releases, and digital signage to reach riders. Mr. Wrenn also noted that agency staff were also directly performing outreach with passengers to inform them about upcoming disruptions.

REO Metrics

Raj Cheriel, Essential Data and Analytics Director, provided the report.

Mr. Cheriel provided details on link ridership and capacity demands following the opening of Lynnwood Link.

Mr. Cheriel noted that the new stations opened for Lynnwood Link have started to see an increased number of boardings, with Northgate no longer being the primary station for riders in the north end of the alignment. He also provided additional information on average vehicle loads and crowding since the opening, noting that the frequency of crowded trains has increased, both in terms of number of stations experiencing trains arriving crowded, as well as the period for crowded trains increasing to about three hours during the AM and PM rush hour periods. Mr. Cheriel also provided information about parking utilization, noting that the Lynnwood Transit Center Garage is now experiencing full utilization in September.

Board member Birney asked about travel patterns and whether it is true that more riders appear to be traveling Southbound since Lynnwood's opening. Mr. Cheriel noted that it is difficult to use this data to know travel patterns for certain, but that it may be the case that riders are travelling in a more condensed period in the morning heading into work, but have a greater diversity of travel times in the afternoon. DCEO Arnold added that on top of this data, an origin and destination survey is also conducted every two years, which may be able to provide further clarity on travel habits.

Board member Frizzell asked for clarity on how parking utilization figures align with vehicle load estimates. Mr. Cheriel noted that the vehicle load estimates are on a per vehicle basis, and that ridership would be a multiple of that figure, the number of trains in a given hour, and the number of vehicles in a consist of one train. DCEO Arnold added that the ridership figures and parking utilization may not fully align due to other services, such as ST Express 515, taking riders off the train.

Board member Frizzell asked if vehicle load data is calculated based on paying ridership or other metrics. Mr. Cheriel responded that each vehicle has an automated passenger counter, which counts all people that pass through them, paying or otherwise. He also noted that due to the system, small errors may be introduced due to non-riders being counted, such as luggage, strollers, or pets.

Committee Chair Walker asked when the data would settle into a pattern that can be used to rely on for other matters. Mr. Cheriel noted that determining that timeframe is difficult due to the diversity of the agency's openings. DCEO Arnold noted that from his experience at other agencies, that bus routes typically take 12 to 18 months to stabilize ridership, and that rail typically takes between 9 and 12 months to solidify. CEO Sparrman added that due to the pandemic, that there has been a large change nationally that has impacted travel patterns across all modes, and that the agency is keeping a close eye on how this will impact ridership stability and tracking over time.

Executive session – None.

Other business – None.

Next meeting

Thursday, December 5, 2024
1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
Ruth Fisher Boardroom and Virtually via Zoom.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:16 p.m.

K L Walker

Kristina Walker
Rider Experience and Operations Committee Chair

ATTEST:

Kathryn Flores

Kathryn Flores
Board Administrator

APPROVED on December 5, 2024, HRR.