



Resolution No. R2024-27

Adopting new fares for ST Express bus service

Meeting:	Date:	Type of action:	Staff contact:
Rider Experience and Operations Committee	12/05/2024	Recommend to Board	Russ Arnold, Service Delivery Deputy CEO
Board	12/19/2024	Final action	Chad Davis, Fares Director

Proposed action

(1) Adopts a new adult fare rate for ST Express bus service, and (2) supersedes the rates of fare established in Resolution No. R2023-37 with the rates of fare established by this action as shown in Attachment A.

Key features summary

- Sound Transit currently has a \$3.25 fare for adult passengers on ST Express routes.
- This action would establish a new \$3.00 fare for adult passengers on ST Express routes.
- This fare change would simplify fares for riders by aligning Sound Transit's adult fares on Link light rail and ST Express bus services.
- The change would also allow frequent riders to purchase one monthly pass for full fare payment on both Link and ST Express and riders using ORCA E-Purse to transfer between Link and ST Express bus service without additional payment of fare. It also aligns with the new fare proposed for the ORCA Regional Day Pass.
- Adopting this new adult fare rate would not change fares for seniors, riders with disabilities, youth, and ORCA LIFT passengers on ST Express routes.

Background

In 2016, Sound Transit Board members and representatives of the six other ORCA agencies in the central Puget Sound region came together in a third Regional Fare Forum for the purpose of providing guidance on transit fare structures in the region. The 2016 Fare Forum recommended ORCA agencies take actions to simplify fares to make regional transit travel easier for customers and to simplify the design of the next generation ORCA system.

Consistent with these recommendations, the Sound Transit Board adopted Resolution No. R2018-05 in 2018 to simplify ST Express bus fares by eliminating the zone fares for adult, ORCA LIFT, youth, senior, and persons with disabilities Disabled passenger categories.

In adopting Resolution No. R2023-37 establishing a flat \$3.00 fare for adult riders on Link light rail, the Sound Transit Board indicated a strong interest in simplifying fares on Sound Transit services and directed staff to “report to the Board on the feasibility of and realistic schedule for getting to fare capping on Sound Transit services that reflects input based on coordination with transit partners.” In addition, the Board’s updated Fare Policy, Resolution No. R2024-08 noted the Board seeks “to update its fare policy to better serve passengers with a fare structure that is regionally integrated to encourage transit ridership through equitable and simple pricing and financial stewardship.”

Sound Transit has worked with ORCA partner agencies to establish a \$3.00 fare value and a \$6.00 price for the ORCA Regional Day Pass. If adopted by the ORCA Joint Board, this would allow Sound Transit and other agency riders paying up to a \$3.00 fare to effectively “cap” their daily transit fares at \$6.00.

Establishing a \$3.00 fare for adult riders on Sound Transit Express bus services will simplify fares for ST riders who use ORCA for fare payment. This will allow frequent riders to purchase one monthly pass for full fare payment on both Link and ST Express and allow riders using ORCA E-Purse to transfer between Link and ST Express bus service without additional payment of fare. This action will also align the ST Express fare with the new fare proposed for the ORCA Regional Day Pass.

Note that the reduced fares for Seniors, Riders with Disabilities and ORCA LIFT riders are already aligned at \$1.00 on all Sound Transit services.

Fiscal information

The \$3.00 ST Express fare was assumed in the Fall 2024 Financial Plan, so approval of this action would not result in a change to projections in Financial Plan. The assumed action reduces the ST Express farebox recovery rate by -0.2% over the life of the Financial Plan.

If this proposal is not approved, it would increase fare revenue in the Financial Plan by \$8.5 million through 2046 and would increase available debt capacity in the minimum year by 0.04% and net DSCR by .001x.

In 2024, the Board adopted an updated Fare Policy, Resolution No. R2024-08, that set the following modal minimum and target farebox recovery ratios for modes that charge fares:

- Sounder commuter rail – 13 percent minimum to 18 percent target.
- ST Express bus – 7 percent minimum to 12 percent target.
- Link light rail – 17 percent minimum to 22 percent target.

The policy also set a systemwide farebox recovery ratio with a minimum of 15 percent and target of 20 percent for all modes.

Under the Fare Policy, the Board must consider a fare change proposal if the farebox recovery ratio falls below the minimum set by the Fare Policy for more than two consecutive calendar years.

In addition, the Fare Policy also provides that “the Board must consider fare changes and review operational expenses by mode that impact the farebox recovery ratio and long-range financial plan” at least once every four years.

Current farebox recovery (as of September 30, 2024) for ST Express bus is at 16 percent and systemwide farebox recovery is at 10 percent. Systemwide performance is expected improve to 15 percent in 2027 as a result of forecasted Sounder ridership increases, and Link ridership increases when the 2 Line and the Federal Way Link Extension are in operation.

As per the updated Fare Policy’s reporting requirements, staff plans to provide a report to the Board on 2024 fare revenue and farebox recovery performance in July 2025 once staff have actual fare revenue and operating cost figures for 2024.

Disadvantaged and small business participation

Not applicable to this action.

Title VI compliance

Sound Transit staff conducted a Fare Equity Analysis in compliance with FTA Title VI requirements and Sound Transit policies. This analysis determined this proposal would have no adverse impact on minority or low-income riders and will therefore not result in any disparate impact or disproportionate burden on these riders.

Public involvement

Sound Transit staff conducted a survey in English and the agency's top six languages to gather input from the public on this proposed change. This survey was live for two weeks and was pushed through different channels such as paid social media ads, a rider alert, press release and street teams. Eighty-eight percent of survey respondents supported this fare change.

Time constraints

Fare changes require sixty-day notice prior to implementation with the regional ORCA system, and these changes must take place on the first of the month to align with pass pricing. A one-month delay would delay implementation of the \$3.00 ST Express fare from March 1 until April 1, resulting in this change happening a month after the planned implementation of new fare value and prices for the ORCA Regional Day Pass, planned for March 1, 2025.

Prior Board/Committee actions

Resolution No. R2023-37: Adopted new rates of fare and fare structure for Link light rail service effective with the opening of the 1 Line extension to Lynnwood City Center Station; and (2) superseded the rates of fare established in Resolution No. R2023-05 with the rates of fare established by this action as shown in Attachment A.

Resolution No. R2023-05: (1) Adopted a \$1.00 fare for ORCA LIFT riders on Sound Transit services, effective March 1, 2023 and (2) superseded the rates of fare established in Resolution No. R2022-29, with the rates of fare established by this action as shown in Attachment A.

Resolution No. R2022-29: (1) Adopted new fare rates and fare structure for Tacoma Link Fares effective with the opening of the Tacoma Link light rail extension in 2023, and (2) superseded the fare rates established in Resolution No. R2016-10, and Resolution No. R2020-28 as amended by Resolution No. R2022-20, with the rates established by this action as shown in Attachment A.

Resolution No. R2022-20: (1) Established a Zero Youth fare on Sound Transit services effective September 1, 2022 by superseding the fare rates established in Resolution No. R2020-28 for youth riders on all Sound Transit services with \$0, as shown in Attachment A and (2) directed staff to develop a report of Youth ORCA ridership on an annual basis.

Resolution No. R2018-05: (1) Adopted new fare rates and fare structure for ST Express bus service, and (2) superseded the fare rates established in Resolution No. R2014-28 and amended by Resolution No. R2015-29 with the rates established by this action as shown in Attachment A.

Resolution No. R2014-28: (1) Selected an option to set fare rates for the low-income adult fare category, and (2) superseded the fare rates established in Resolution No. R2007-06, Resolution No. R2010-11, and Resolution No. R2013-24 with the rates established by this action as shown in Attachment A.

Resolution No. R2014-27: Amended Resolution No. R2010-10 Attachment A --Fare Policy to establish "Low Income Adult" as a new Reduced Fare category.

Resolution No. R2010-11: Adopted fare structures and fare rates for ST Express and Link and superseding Resolution No. R2009-01 and Resolution No. R2005-05.

Environmental review – KH 11/18/24

Legal review – AJP 11/23/2024



Resolution No. R2024-27

A RESOLUTION of the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (1) adopting new rates of fare for ST Express bus service, and (2) superseding the rates of fare established in Resolution No. R2023-37 with the rates of fare established by this action as shown in Attachment A.

WHEREAS, the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority, commonly known as Sound Transit, was formed under chapters 81.104 and 81.112 of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) for the Pierce, King, and Snohomish Counties region by action of their respective county councils pursuant to RCW 81.112.030; and

WHEREAS, Sound Transit is authorized to plan, construct, and permanently operate a high-capacity system of transportation infrastructure and services to meet regional public transportation needs in the Central Puget Sound region; and

WHEREAS, in general elections held within the Sound Transit district on November 5, 1996, November 4, 2008, and November 8, 2016, voters approved local funding to implement a regional high-capacity transportation system for the Central Puget Sound region; and

WHEREAS, RCW 81.112.080 grants a regional transit authority the power to establish fares; and

WHEREAS, Sound Transit is committed to meeting fare revenue requirements to wisely manage public funds in accordance with state law while fulfilling its mission; and

WHEREAS, the Sound Transit Board establishes fare structures and sets corresponding fare rates for light rail, commuter rail, and express bus services; and

WHEREAS, Sound Transit Board Resolution No. R2014-27 amended the Board's Fare Policy to add a low-income adult fare category and Sound Transit Board Resolution No. R2015-29 established a low-income fare as well as increased the base fare on ST Express bus service which became effective on March 1, 2016; and

WHEREAS, regional fare forums comprised of elected officials convened in 1997, 2007, and 2016 and recommended policies for regional transit fare integration in the Central Puget Sound region, which guided the development of interlocal agreements establishing a regional fare integration framework to provide seamless fare payment for regional transit customers; and

WHEREAS, Sound Transit Board Resolution No. 2018-05 simplified fares on ST Express bus service by establishing a flat fare for each customer category; and

WHEREAS, Sound Transit Board Resolution No. R2023-37 simplified fares on Link light rail service by establishing a \$3.00 flat fare for full fare riders; and

WHEREAS, Sound Transit Board Resolution No. R2024-08 updated fare policy to better serve passengers with a fare structure that is regionally integrated to encourage transit ridership through equitable and simple pricing and financial stewardship; and

WHEREAS, Sound Transit is committed to providing opportunities for public involvement and conducting equity analyses of potential impacts to minority and low-income populations before considering fare changes and a Fare Equity Analysis has been reported to the Board with

findings of no disparate impact for minority passengers and no disproportionate burden for low-income passengers of any of the fare rates under consideration; and

WHEREAS, public input received via public outreach events, email, the Sound Transit website, telephone, an online survey, and a public hearing has been reported to the Board.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority as follows:

Section 1: A \$3.00 fare for adult passengers on ST Express bus is adopted effective on March 1, 2025.

Section 2: The rates of fare established in Resolution No. R2023-05 are superseded with the rates of fares established by this action as shown in Attachment A.

ADOPTED by the Board of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority at a regular meeting thereof held on December 19, 2024.



Dow Constantine
Board Chair

Attest:



Kathryn Flores
Board Administrator



Resolution No. R2024-27 Attachment A: Revised Fare Rates

Replacing fare rates established in Resolution No. R2023-37

Link Light Rail Fares (Current as of August 30, 2024):

	Fare
Adult	\$3.00
Low Income Adult (ORCA LIFT)	\$1.00
Youth	\$0
Seniors/Persons with Disability	\$1.00

Tacoma Link Fares (Current as of December 1, 2023):

	Fare
Adult	\$2.00
Low Income Adult (ORCA LIFT)	\$1.00
Youth	\$0
Seniors/Persons with Disability	\$1.00

ST Express Bus Fares (Current as of December 1, 2023):

	Fare
Adult	\$3.25
Low Income Adult (ORCA LIFT)	\$1.00
Youth	\$0
Seniors/Persons with Disability	\$1.00

ST Express Bus Fares ((Effective on March 1, 2025):

	Fare
Adult	\$3.00
Low Income Adult (ORCA LIFT)	\$1.00
Youth	\$0
Seniors/Persons with Disability	\$1.00

Sounder Commuter Rail Fares (Current as of December 1, 2023):

Sounder South (Lakewood-Seattle)

Adult	Lakewood	South Tacoma	Tacoma	Puyallup	Sumner	Auburn	Kent	Tukwila	Seattle
Lakewood		\$3.25	\$3.50	\$4.00	\$4.00	\$4.50	\$4.75	\$5.00	\$5.75
South Tacoma	\$3.25		\$3.25	\$3.75	\$4.00	\$4.25	\$4.50	\$5.00	\$5.50
Tacoma	\$3.50	\$3.25		\$3.50	\$3.50	\$4.00	\$4.25	\$4.50	\$5.25
Puyallup	\$4.00	\$3.75	\$3.50		\$3.25	\$3.50	\$4.00	\$4.25	\$4.75
Sumner	\$4.00	\$4.00	\$3.50	\$3.25		\$3.50	\$3.75	\$4.00	\$4.75
Auburn	\$4.50	\$4.25	\$4.00	\$3.50	\$3.50		\$3.25	\$3.75	\$4.25
Kent	\$4.75	\$4.50	\$4.25	\$4.00	\$3.75	\$3.25		\$3.25	\$4.00
Tukwila	\$5.00	\$5.00	\$4.50	\$4.25	\$4.00	\$3.75	\$3.25		\$3.75
Seattle	\$5.75	\$5.50	\$5.25	\$4.75	\$4.75	\$4.25	\$4.00	\$3.75	

Adult fares calculated as \$3.05 base fare plus \$0.055 per mile, rounded to quarters for consistency.

Sounder North (Everett-Seattle)

Adult	Everett	Mukilteo	Edmonds	Seattle
Everett		\$3.25	\$4.00	\$5.00
Mukilteo	\$3.25		\$3.75	\$4.50
Edmonds	\$4.00	\$3.75		\$4.00
Seattle	\$5.00	\$4.50	\$4.00	

Low Income Adult (ORCA LIFT): All one-way Low Income Adult fares are \$1.00

Youth: All Youth fares are \$0

Seniors/Persons with Disability: All one-way Link fares for Seniors/Persons with a Disability are \$1.00