

# ***May 2025 Board Retreat***

*5/29/2025*

# *Land Acknowledgment*

Today we would like to start by acknowledging the original inhabitants of this land we are meeting on today.

We acknowledge we are on the Indigenous Land of Coast Salish peoples who have reserved treaty rights to this land, including the Suquamish Tribe (dxwəqʷabš), Muckleshoot Indian Tribe (bəqəlšul), and Snoqualmie Indian Tribe (sdukwalbixw).

Since time immemorial, they have hunted, fished, gathered on, and taken care of these lands and waters. We respect their sovereignty, their right to self-determination and honor their sacred spiritual connection with the land and water.

# Retreat Purpose & Outcomes

- Build **trust and rapport** among Board members and agency leadership for regional problem-solving.
- Develop a **shared understanding** of the nature and scale of challenges and opportunities facing the agency, and what the Board can do about them.
- Begin establishing **shared principles and priorities** that will inform decision making.



# ***Retreat Agenda***

- 10:30** Welcome/Introductions
- 11:00** Sound Transit History
- 11:30** Sound Transit Today
- 12:00** Lunch
- 12:30** Future Challenges/  
Opportunities
- 2:30** Adjourn



# 1:1 Warm-up “Quiz Quiz Trade”

## *Time to Discover...*

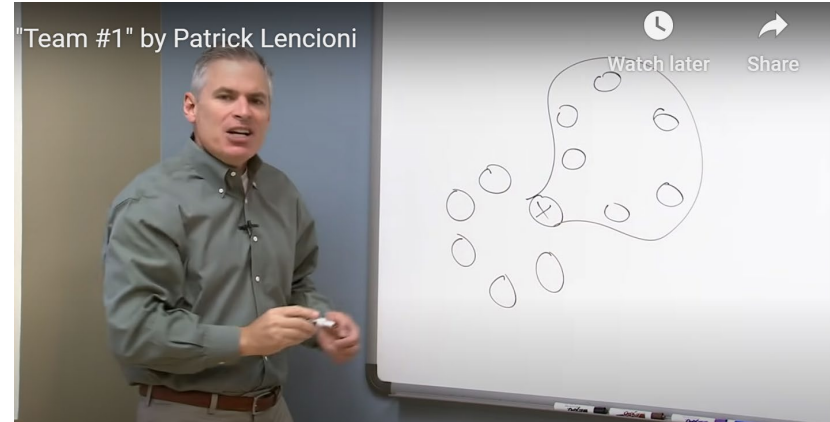
- 1) Pair up.
- 2) Ask your question/partner answers.
- 3) Partner asks/You answer.
- 4) Trade cards.
- 5) Put your hand up- find a partner you haven't asked yet.



# *The importance of FIRST TEAM in our Context*

## “First Team”

- The team you lead
- The team you're a member of (this team)



*Sound Transit History:  
The “Eras” Tour*

# 35 Years of Sound Transit, in 5 Eras

Beginnings	Startup & Survival	First Openings & ST2	Momentum & ST3	A Changed World
1990-1996	1997-2003	2004-2010	2011-2019	2020-2025

## *Overview for each era will cover:*

- System size.
- Milestones.
- Major themes.
- Plan adoption(s) and “realignments.”
- Exogenous events and agency responses.



# Beginnings: 1990-1996

## Beginnings

1990-1996

### *Milestones*

- **1990:** ST authorizing legislation passes.
- **1990:** Downtown Transit Tunnel opens to Metro buses.
- **1993:** County Councils approve agency formation.
- **1994:** First long-range plan adopted.
- **1995:** Failed public vote.
- **1996:** Sound Move passes.

### *Major themes*

- Regional recognition of the need for high-capacity regional transit.
- Sound Transit taxing district created, mission aligned with urban growth boundaries.
- Subarea Equity policy adopted, seeking to ensure balanced investments throughout service district.



**Regional Transit Authority**

### *System Size*

- **Link:** none
- **Sounder:** none

# Startup & Survival

Beginnings

1990-1996

Startup & Survival

1997-2003

## Milestones

- **1999:** ST Express begins, Link project selected (SeaTac–U District).
- **2000:** Sounder launches (Tacoma–Seattle).
- **2000:** Link project pauses, agency survival threatened.
- **2001:** First “realignment” reduces Central Link to Westlake–Tukwila.
- **2003:** Tacoma Link service begins, Sounder launches between Everett–Seattle, Link breaks ground, Link operating agreement signed with Metro.

## Major themes

- Success of first service launches for ST Express, Sounder, Tacoma Link.
- Importance of regional partners in early operations
- Major Link cost increase, leading to agency crisis, audits, grant suspension
- First significant modifications to voter-approved plans.



(Peter McLaughlin)

## System Size

- **Link:** 1.6 miles (Tacoma)
- **Sounder:** 74 miles

# First Openings & ST2

Beginnings	Startup & Survival	First Openings & ST2
1990-1996	1997-2003	2004-2010

## Milestones

- **2003-2008:** Central Link construction.
- **2005:** Long range plan update.
- **2007:** Roads & Transit measure fails.
- **2008:** ST2 passes, approving phased expansion to Northgate, Redmond, Lynnwood, and Federal Way.
- **2009:** Link opens in July (Seattle-Tukwila), expands to SeaTac in Dec, construction begins to UW.
- **2010:** Great Recession forces second realignment, reduces ST2 scope.

## Major themes

- Long range plan updated, system plan adopted, first significant revenue shortfall and *program-wide* realignment.
- First 13 Link stations open.
- Joint bus-rail operations in Downtown Seattle introduce long-term operating compromises.



## System Size

- **Link:** 17.2 miles
- **Sounder:** 74 miles

# Accelerating Momentum

Beginnings	Startup & Survival	First Openings & ST2	Momentum & ST3
1990-1996	1997-2003	2004-2010	2011-2019

## Milestones

- **2012:** Construction begins UW–Northgate, Sounder expands to Lakewood.
- **2014:** Long range plan updated.
- **2016:** Link expands to Capitol Hill, UW, Angle Lake; ridership increases sharply.
- **2016:** ST3 system plan adopted, gets voter approval to become one of the largest transit expansion in North America.
- **2017:** I-90 Express Lanes close, East Link breaks ground.
- **2019:** Joint bus-rail operations end, Lynnwood Link breaks ground.

## Major themes

- System complexity increases, operating challenges become more apparent.
- Strong regional support for completion of the regional system



## System Size

- **Link:** 22 miles
- **Sounder:** 81 miles

# A Changed World

Beginnings	Startup & Survival	First Openings & ST2	Momentum & ST3	A Changed World
1990-1996	1997-2003	2004-2010	2011-2019	2020-2025

## Milestones

- **2020:** COVID-19 decimates ridership and permanently changes travel demand, causes yo-yo recession, inflates property values and materials costs
- **2021:** Link (now 1 Line) expands to Northgate, third program realignment.
- **2023:** Tacoma Link (now T Line) expands to Stadium and Hilltop.
- **2024:** 2 Line launches (South Bellevue–Redmond Technology), 1 Line expands to Lynnwood.
- **2025:** 2 Line expands to Downtown Redmond.

## Major themes

- Prior generational investments open for service; system massively expands in a short time.
- Link light rail becomes regional, doubling from 22 stations to 45, serving 8 cities.
- Operational shortcomings become increasingly apparent as new extensions open.
- Capital and operating cost increases threaten program affordability.
- Board directed implementation reforms (TAG etc.)



## System Size

- **Link:** 48 miles
- **Sounder:** 81 miles

# Key Takeaways

- We have already made successful generational investments, and our voter-approved system is approximately 50% complete today.
- ST's governance structure and financial policies anticipated that capital and operating cost forecasts will always be moving targets and active, ongoing board management of the capital program was required
- The Board has successfully navigated three major program adjustments. These program adjustments were multi-year efforts in order to have time to develop quality input for decisions.
- Maintaining momentum is key during program adjustments. Delay is itself a major cost driver.
- Transparency, trust and collaboration between Board members and ST staff is essential.
- Strong partnerships with cities, local communities, and state and federal governments are necessary to define, permit, and fund the regional system.

***Sound Transit Today:  
CEO Constantine***

***Lunch break***



# ***Future Challenges and Opportunities***

# *Future challenges and opportunities*

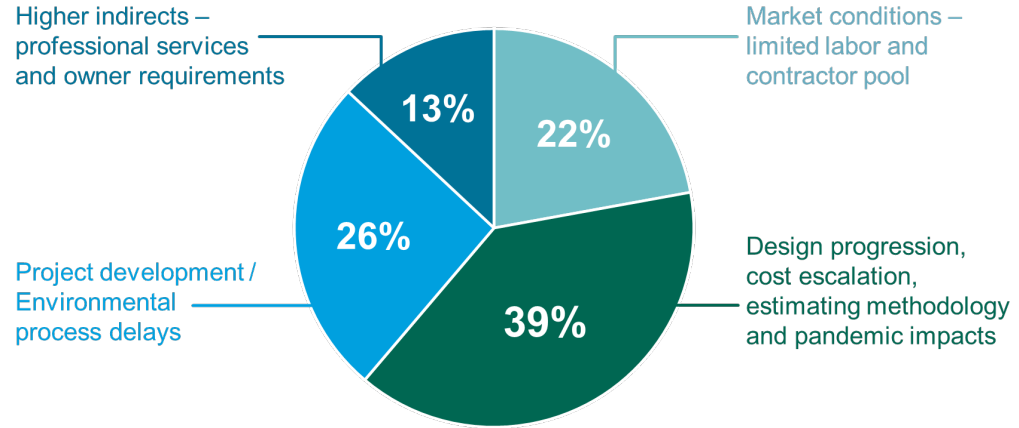
## *Overview*

- We have solved program affordability challenges before, and we can do so again.
- We must face this challenge differently than in previous eras, with heavier focus on operations, maintenance, and systemwide thinking.
- Upcoming challenges are significant, multifaceted, and interconnected, but we also have the tools and resources to solve each of them.
- We must integrate work across our capital delivery, service delivery, finance, and planning/policy programs.

# Future challenges and opportunities

## Capital program

- West Seattle not an isolated situation – cost growth on all projects.
- Some cost growth is unprecedented, industry/economy-wide, and outside of agency control.
- Some cost growth relates to agency process, procedure, and delays since ST3 adoption.



*Drivers of cost growth on  
West Seattle Link Extension project*

# ***Future challenges and opportunities***

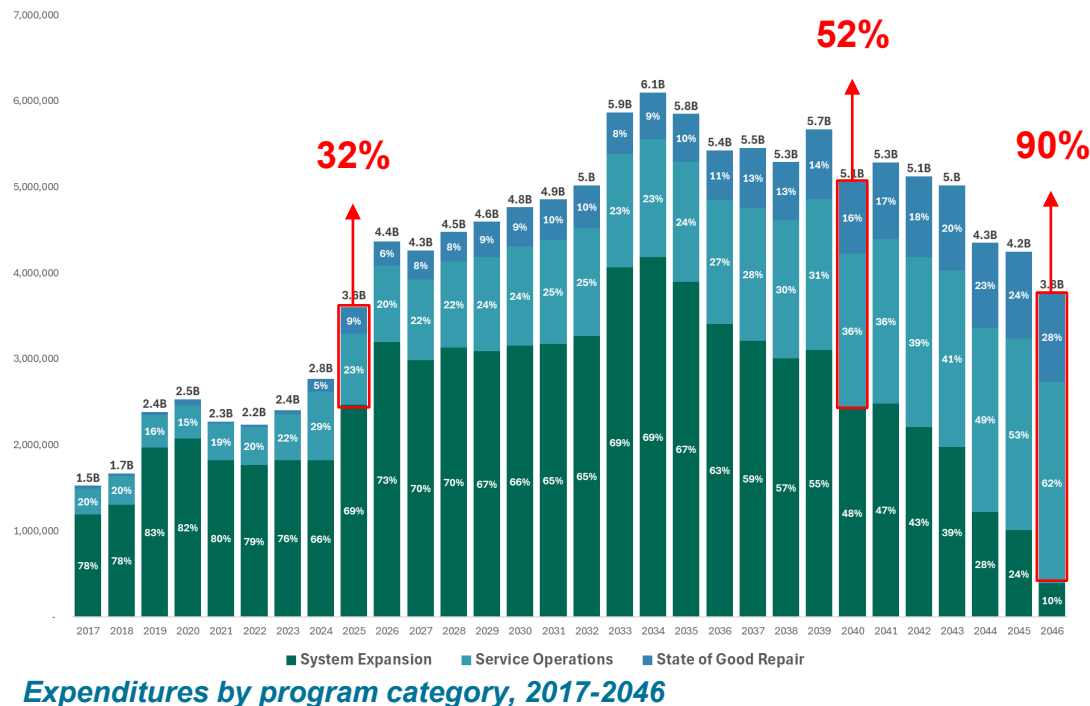
## ***Capital program***

- Board direction stemming from WSLE actions in late 2024 means a capital delivery team is at work already.
- We will keep advancing projects to ensure we are not a source of delay.
- Available tools to solve these challenges:
  - Find project-specific and program efficiencies.
  - Modify or reduce project scopes.
  - Open projects in phases.
  - Reconsider projects.

# Future challenges and opportunities

## Service delivery

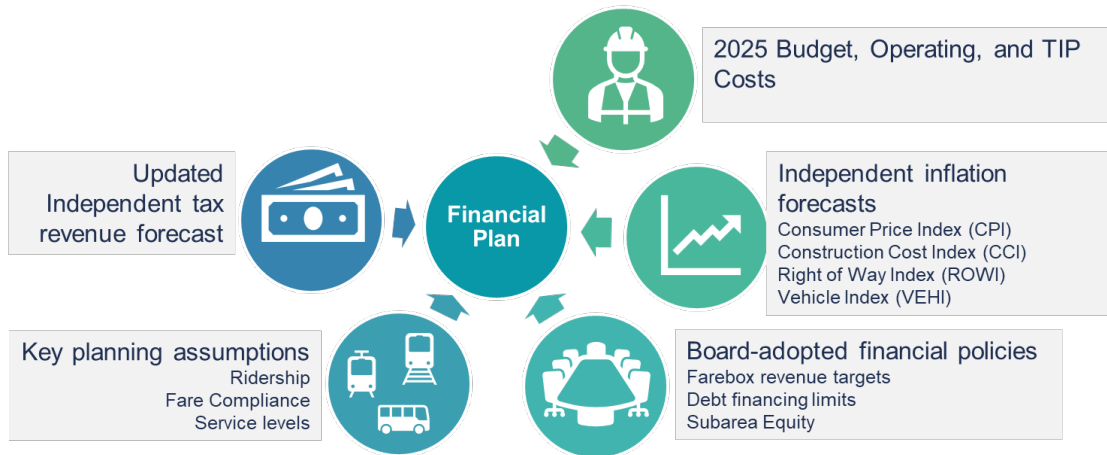
- Costs to operate and maintain the system are an increasingly large share of the long-range financial plan.
- Operating costs are connected to the capital program, past and future.
- Active efforts underway related to light rail system resiliency to help confirm that we have the necessary resources to provide a safe, reliable service for passengers.



# Future challenges and opportunities

## Finance

- Capital and service cost risks as previously covered.
- Persistent inflation and macroeconomic uncertainty is compounded by tariffs and trade impacts to costs and revenues.
- We will be proactive in assessing and maximizing existing financial capacity.

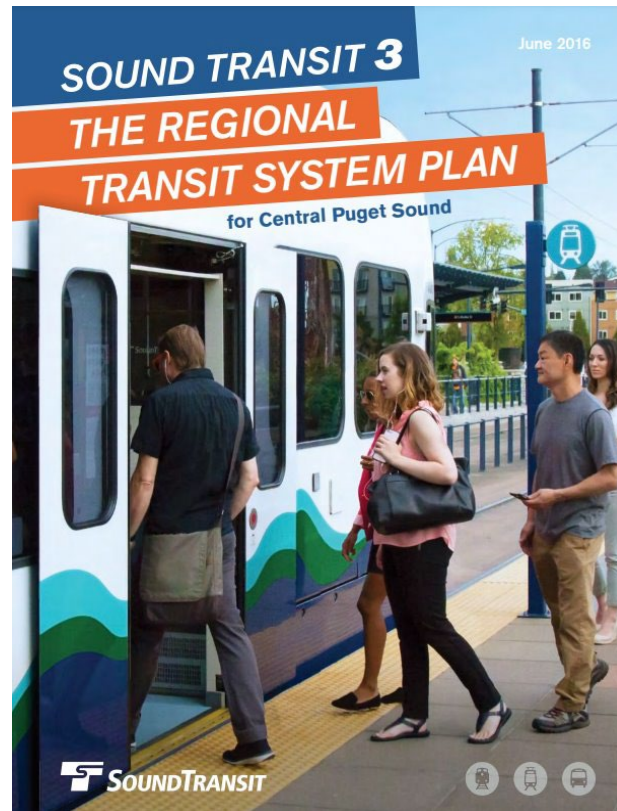


*Key inputs to the Long-Range Financial Plan*

# Future challenges and opportunities

## Planning & policy

- ST3 adopted in 2016 with significant, historic change since then.
- COVID-19 has had a generational effect on transit demand, reducing it at peak hours and increasing it mid-day, evening, and on weekends.
- The maturing light rail system should change the way that we look at future operating, maintenance, and planning assumptions.
- We believe that our plans *should* frequently adapt to observed realities over time, maximizing the benefits that our transit system can bring to the region.



# ***Future challenges and opportunities***

## ***Next steps***

- This will be a major area of focus for the Board in 2025–2026.
- This afternoon's exercise will ground Board members in existing service and projects in each corridor (north, central, east, south).
- It will also be an opportunity to highlight what's changed, to understand what priorities currently are today, and to help establish key principles and values to guide our work.



*An Opportunity to  
Understand More at the  
Corridor Level*

# *Round Robin instructions*

- Select one of four corridor tables. You will have the opportunity to visit each table.
- We will have four 15-minute rounds for you to engage in a small team.
- Leave any thoughts/questions/insights in sticky note form at the tables to be collected.
- Be prepared to discuss in our main session after:  
What do we, as a “first team”, need to prioritize to solve these challenges together?

# ***Conclusion***

# *Discussion and insights*

- What high level themes emerged?
- What principles should we consider prioritizing as we look to solve these challenges together?

# *Next Steps*

## **In June:**

- **Executive Committee:** CEO, Chair, and Committee debrief and reflections from today's retreat
- **Board meeting:** A roadmap, schedule, and framework for how we'll work together to solve upcoming challenges

*Thank you.*



 [soundtransit.org](https://soundtransit.org)

