

Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

January 8, 2025

COP Members Present: Paul Thompson, Scott Lampe, Mark Lewington, Diana Cambronero Venegas, Zak Osborne, Tom Norcott, Charlotte Murry, James Peyton, Linda Dorris, Donia Zaheri, Tina Pierce, Lucas Simons, Trevor Reed

COP Members Absent: Lorenzo Frazier

Others Present: Adam Montee, Katie Flores, and Nancy Thai

Technical Advisory Group Wrap-up

- Terri Mestas – Deputy CEO, Chief Capital Delivery Officer

Staff presented an update on agency implementation of Technical Advisory Group (TAG) recommendations and next steps. There were six TAG recommendations:

- Rebuild trust and clarify the roles for Sound Transit board and staff.
- Introduce an experienced megaproject capital program executive team
- Implement procedures that push decision-making down to the lowest appropriate level
- Align key procedures with industry best practices
- Strengthen and enforce an agency betterment policy
- Engage the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) as a delivery partner

Staff worked on several initiatives to address the TAG recommendations. The first initiative was a Project Management Information System (PMIS). Having a PMIS is common across small to large capital programs and addresses a variety of issues. A PMIS platform has already been selected, and implementation is beginning this year. A PMIS will put a focus on quality information to use to make informed decisions, allow the agency to map their processes, and automate workflows – the PMIS allows sending notifications to people working on a project to improve efficiency. Staff will allow certain contractors access to specific portions of the PMIS, which will help people stay on the same page.

Another initiative is project change management. Staff are developing collaborative delivery approaches, sharing as much information as possible with industry so they can prepare for upcoming work and build excitement about pursuing Sound Transit work. Staff have held workshops with members of industry for West Seattle Link Extension to ask for feedback and provide opportunities to ask questions. Staff are also considering lessons learned from ST2, and working to make sure the Sound Transit team is equipped to be collaborative. Having heard feedback from contractors' concern about truly being collaborative with Sound Transit, the entire Capital Delivery Department is attending the DBIA (Design-Build Institute of America) training on collaborative work. The capital delivery team will be completely staffed in February.

The next initiative is procurement and contracting. Having a holistic procurement approach and strategy will help to attract top contractors to pursue projects. Staff have developed metrics to evaluate each phase: 1) Requirements, 2) industry outreach, 3) procurement strategy, 4) solicitation, 5) contract award, 6) delivery, and 7) lessons learned. Diving into professional services procurement, staff will work to bring in top partners through nimble contracts and more efficient and timeline procurement processes. The agency will also have bench contracts, Multiple Award Task Order Contract (MATOC), to bring on more than one firm to complete tasks through task orders. These MATOCs will be accessible by multiple departments and improve efficiencies, while still maintain the ability to still create specific procurements.

Sound Transit has signed onto the Equity in Infrastructure Pledge. This is a joint pledge to award more contracts to Historically Underutilized Businesses (HUBs), and has been signed by others including WSDOT, King County, and Port of Seattle.

The organizational restructure initiative aligns with Mobilize One Sound Transit (MOST) goals. There is a new Strategy department and one department was renamed to Agency Oversight. Capital Delivery was formerly two departments and now they are collapsed into one department. The Capital Delivery Department consists of:

- Delivery Team 1 (Eastlink, Federal Way, and Lynnwood Link Extensions, Downtown Redmond Link, and OMF South and North)
- Delivery Team 2 (West Seattle and Ballard Link Extensions and infill stations)
- Delivery Team 3 (Everett and Tacoma Dome Link Extensions and Stride)
- Delivery Team 4 (state of good repair and Sounder)
- Capital Delivery Transformation (e.g., tracking costs and accountability)
- Center of Excellence (e.g., architecture, engineering, planning, project close out, real property)
- Chief of Staff Office

The next initiative focuses on betterments and scope control, which could be created by an owner or result from code interpretations. Staff's strategy here is to engage with project partners early and create an agreement on how to do that engagement. Staff are looking at memorandums of understandings (MOUs) now to unify them. One method to engage with project partners early is at potentially creating a joint West Seattle team at Union Station so there is greater collaboration earlier. Staff have also created a dashboard to track betterments.

The partnerships initiative aims to connect governing and industry partners to support Sound Transit's Capital Program. Staff meet regularly with the FTA and cities. They also have a new forecast of when Sound Transit anticipates engagement with partners so partners can better plan, including planning for capacity needs, to engage with the agency.

Staff have key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure progress on the TAG recommendations (listed on slide 19 of the Agency Implementation of TAG Recommendations presentation).

One member asked if staff have any insights on the FTA and any impacts from policies that may come from the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). Uncertain currently, but the same Trump transition team is in place, so they are known entities, which staff sees as positive.

Another member asked how Sound Transit decides what to include in a consultant bench or what to complete in-house. Staff look at how to best utilize Sound Transit staff. When there is not enough staff capacity, then they look at a MATOC for support. Partnering with consultants helps build capacity of small businesses and is a growth opportunity for smaller businesses. Staff anticipate 10 awards per MATOC. Additionally, there are limitations on the number of people Sound Transit can hire, but the agency tries to do as much in-house as possible. However, the agency doesn't always have the depth of specific expertise for these large complex projects, for instance, there is no design practice in Sound Transit.

A member asked if there are still eight members of the TAG. There were originally eight people, but then that number was fewer. The contract is complete now, but there is a new contract for three of the members to continue as needed.

A member asked how much power or leverage does the agency have when there is arbitration with a jurisdiction on a betterment. The agency does have a process to escalate to a resolution and staff work to

make decisions early and anticipate issues rather than getting stuck on decisions. There is also earlier testing, and agreements with partners in place.

Another member asked if there will be staffing increases with such a large capital project to help address internal capacity. A lot of work on ST2 is completing and so the agency can transfer some staff to continue on new projects. For example, tunnel experts moving on to new Sound Transit projects since there will be future tunnels. However, staff will consider different staffing models in the future.

Fare Ambassador Program Update

- Tanya Starke, Acting Deputy Director – Passenger Success

Staff presented the fare engagement program performance quarterly report. The fare inspection rate is 2.83%, with 9% of those inspections being non-compliant. Of the non-compliant inspections, 3.5% of people had valid ID. Fare media (ORCA taps) use has trended upwards on both Sounder and Link light rail.

Staff shared non-payment data and resolution options. First and second non-payment interactions make up 98.5% of total citations (not including did not disclose (DND) interactions). Staff are not able to distinguish between first or second warnings due to the tracking software used. Previously, the agency had onboard fare enforcement and issued monetary civil infractions, but has since moved to a more equitable fare enforcement program that has internal resolution pathways that offers different, non-monetary options for people. The fifth infraction and beyond do lead to non-criminal infractions, but the program does not rely on tracking people down to pay fare and emphasizes education. Resolution pathways for third and fourth interactions include completing Sound Transit surveys, participating in transit education, signing a commitment to tap in the future, loading a minimum amount on an ORCA card, or paying a fine to the internal resolution team.

The agency is currently piloting platform-based inspections. Fare ambassadors check fares on platforms after passengers enter a fare-paid zone, before people board trains. Changing inspection procedures from on trains to platform-based improves equity, customer experience, safety, and efficiency. With the platform-based inspections, the program can focus on stations with higher ridership while fare ambassadors can provide a more comprehensive and holistic customers experience. Security officers are in closer proximity to fare ambassadors to improve safety, and this model has the potential to generate a higher inspection rate by reducing onboard inefficiencies.

The program is currently in phase 2 of expanding the platform inspection program and is working with the Civil Rights, Equity, and Inclusion Department. Platform inspections show that passengers are able to go back and purchase fare, whereas they would not have that opportunity if the inspection occurred on a train.

Staff will work on collecting passenger feedback, continue station-specific testing with a focus on stations with high ridership and in the sound end, diversifying and strengthening data collection methods, and strengthening collaboration with safety and security officers to support Fare Ambassadors.

Staff are also hosting outreach events to invite people to join Fare Ambassadors to be more representative of the communities served.

Staff extended an invitation to COP members to shadow fare ambassadors.

A member asked what the non-fare boarding slide (slide 5) means. It is the number of ORCA taps that are trending upwards.

Another member asked why there are not as many inspections on the north end stations. The inspection program will expand when the north stations fully open and will also occur on Line 2 on the east side.

A member asked if there is a percentage goal of how many people to inspect. There is a goal of 10%, but this is an ambitious goal given the number of fare ambassadors available and the number of passengers they would need to inspect.

A member asked about the return on having fare ambassadors. The fare ambassadors encourage good habits and for passengers to follow rules and regulations. Their presence helps make the whole system safer and extends past just fare box recovery.

Another member commented that this presentation on the numbers of inspections is more encouraging than expected given the last presentation and it is encouraging to see the program has a lighter touch on punishment. The member wondered how the Board reacted to the program. The Board has been overall positive, not just regarding fare recovery, but also customer service and helping improve Sound Transit's reputation.

One member asked if there is data on compliance for ST Express or Sounder. There is some data collected, but those modes do not have the same fare collection challenges as the Link, as those modes are used more by commuters.

Another member asked how Sound Transit compares with other agencies with regards to compliance. Staff do not have an answer right now, but will circle back.

A member asked if other large agencies have a tap-on and tap-off system. Staff member Sanford Slack responded there was one other agency in Los Angeles for comparison, and potentially an agency in London. Unsure if other agencies have a fare resolutions program.

ORCA Program Update

- Chris McKnight, Director – Regional Fare Systems

ORCA is Puget Sound region's fare payment system that includes seven agencies: Community Transit, Everett Transit, King County Metro, Sound Transit, Washington State Ferries, Pierce Transit, and Kitsap Transit. There are free transfers between all modes, except ferry. Over 60% of revenue is from business accounts. This is a leading percentage of an agency's revenue in the region – so it is important to include staff and business partners in the ORCA's program and development.

The ORCA ecosystem sees the seven agencies as customers, with some of those agencies also serving as providers. Regional ORCA operations are supported by Sound Transit (serving as the host agency and maintaining vending machines), King County Metro (managing card inventory), INIT (providing the software), and Ready Credit (supporting retailers that customers can visit to purchase ORCA cards and can use cash).

The ORCA operations team is overseen by a joint board including a member from each of the seven participating agencies. The ORCA director reports to the joint board. There are six departments that report to the ORCA director: system operations, financial management, customer experience (which

includes website and apps improvements, marketing, customer feedback, etc.), information security, product delivery (which include tools that are used by staff), and business operations.

The Regional ORCA Operations Team (ROOT) mission is to unify the voices of regional partners and provide an accessible, innovative, and easy-to-use payment solution for all transit customers. Multiple regional partners means ORCA must work to unify multiple priorities and needs. The ROOT vision is a world where payments enable mobility, where ORCA is integral to more customer journeys.

There have been several key product launches since the new ORCA system launch in 2022. The retail network expansion was also launched in 2022. In 2023, a new website, mobile apps, and customer notifications, which allowed customers with an account to choose how they receive communications from ORCA, including SMS text, were launched. ORCA in Google Wallet launched last year in 2024.

ORCA staff started a customer survey beginning in 2023 with many responses that were representative of customers served. Staff didn't see much change in satisfaction levels with the system between 2023 and 2024 data. Customer experience responses, with 92% reporting being either "very" or "somewhat" satisfied in both 2023 and 2024, show high satisfaction with ORCA product. Additionally, 97% of survey respondents in 2023 and 2024 reported they would be either "very" or "somewhat" likely to recommend an ORCA card to someone who uses transit in the area.

Next steps for ORCA is to offer more ways to pay, including open payments - the ability to use credits or digital credit cards on phones. Staff are also working to provide wider access to transit to people eligible for lower fares and raise awareness of these programs. Staff are working on a regional refresh on the regional ORCA Lift program now. It will include new marketing materials and the website translated in more languages and available in more places. Staff are also working with agencies related to social services or who distribute reduced fare cards to raise awareness of these programs to more people who may be eligible.

Staff shared two options to stay connected. The first is the ORCA monthly newsletter "Tapping In," one of the first places ORCA communicates news. The second is a Linktree with social media, customer service, and top content. QR codes to access both are on slide 12 of the ORCA Update 01-08-25 presentation.

One member asked how many of the operations team are Sound Transit staff. Operations staff are all Sound Transit staff, but paid for by all seven agencies.

Another member asked how expenses are allocated if seven agencies pay collectively. There is a formula based on ridership for each agency. It is a use-based system, a larger agency pays a higher proportion of costs since they have more riders.

A member shared their appreciation that ORCA is easy to use.

A member shared observations while using Google wallet. They wondered why there is a \$5 minimum load when fare is now \$3, curious how this may impact people who are only here temporarily, like visitors for large events like the World Cup. The auto reload amount felt high, especially for people who aren't commuting daily. Finally, when trying to screenshot the receipt on the payment history page, the ORCA logo disappears (for reimbursement purposes).

One member asked if there are banks involved with processing payments, and would that mean a new system if ORCA allows payment by card. Currently it is a closed loop system, but there would be another payment gateway built when ORCA allows payment by card, which would make it an open system.

Another member shared they have an ORCA card that is subsidized, but issued by their company, and asked if the company chooses if the ORCA card is available on Google Wallet. Yes, there is some back-end administration on the company side, so companies choose whether to turn on that function or not. The member continued as asked if reduced fare ORCA cards are also available digitally. Reduced fare cards can be added to Google Wallet. All cards that are acquired by individuals for their own use are able to be connected.

A member asked if it is possible in the future to integrate the ORCA card into Google Pay, Apple Pay, or the ORCA app so it's not tied to a physical student ID card (Husky card at University of Washington). Staff are looking into that.

Another member asked if it is possible to break out the satisfaction level of ORCA between businesses and individuals. That level of detail may provide a more nuanced look at opportunities to improve, especially for businesses, as they provide a large portion of revenue. There may be a way to do that, staff will look into it and circle back.

Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary, Member Reports

The administrator will edit the December meeting notes based on tonight's conversation around page 5; and on page 2, fourth line, change to 95,000 riders on the light rail system.

Motion to adopt December meeting notes as edited, seconded, and approved.

Instead of a third presentation at the February meeting, take that time to have a conversation around the annual report and what to include.

Selecting this year's field trip: OMF East, FWLE, and a new third option to potentially visit the I-90 bridge. Staff will check in with staff to see if visiting the I-90 bridge is possible because there is active construction.

One member shared that their friends were riding the Link on New Year's Eve and the link completely missed the Capitol Hill station. Not sure if there was something else going on or if anyone else has experienced that.

Another member shared that the Sound Transit marketing team did open an account on Bluesky (social media platform). The ORCA team did as well. This was in reference to a past COP presentation by the marketing department. The member noted that a search on Facebook for Sound Transit brought up offensive material ahead of the Sound Transit page, which could be counter-productive to the goals of marketing there.

Two members shared that they took the Link south after last month's meeting and it inexplicably stopped at the Columbia City station. It was a disappointing event, especially after CEO Sparrman's agency updates, which included Link light rail challenges with reliability.

One member commented how an agency goal of better collaboration between the agency and contractors is a cost savings. The ORCA program update was encouraging.

Another member commented that with Amazon going back to work five days a week, the trains have been fuller. Curious how the agency will handle that during rush hour.

A member commented they would like to have more time with Terri and have her come back again. They would like to hear more about the organizational change on staff and more details on lessons learned.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, February 12, 2025, 5:30 – 8:15 PM

- Information Security Update
- Tacoma Dome Link Extension Project Update
- Annual report conversation