

## Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

**June 12, 2024**

**COP Members Present:** Mark Lewington, Tina Pierce, Scott Lampe, Tom Norcott, Charlotte Murry, James Peyton, Zak Osborne, Lucas Simons, Donia Zaheri and Paul Thompson

**COP Members Absent:** Diana Cambronero Venegas, and Lorenzo Frazier

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

### **Welcome new members and COP Administrator**

The meeting opened with introductions of two new COP members, Mark Lewington and Zak Osborne, and new administrator, Nancy Thai. Members shared their names, their background, and what their goals are for being on the COP.

### **Meeting with Sound Transit Rider Experience and Operations Committee Chair Kristina Walker**

Board member Kristina Walker joined virtually to meet the COP members. Board member Walker is also a Tacoma City council member and has served on the board since mid-2021. She has worked in transportation advocacy, served on the Pierce Transit Board, and is a member of the rider experience and operations committee.

The Rider Experience and Operations committee has jurisdiction over the rider experience and state of good repair work, system maintenance and administrative work of operations. It does not have jurisdiction over the new system, that is in the system expansion committee. Board member Walker and the committee are working on the Lynnwood station opening on August 30, 2024; operating metrics for elevators and escalators – making great progress, but understand it's a frustration point; customer survey results have a lot of great data; looking at agency safety plan; BRT service plan; next steps of connecting Eastlink to Redmond and across the I-90 bridge; and are also considering pedestrian and bicycle access to the Link.

A member thanked board member Walker for being here and asked if there are any particular highlights in the customer experience survey. Board member Walker responded people who are riding transit love transit, but not likely to recommend it to friends – staff explored that a little more and there is a sense that people can make the choice to take transit for themselves, but would be nervous to recommend transit to others in light of safety issues and perceived issues (most people hadn't personally experienced a safety issue, but have heard of issues).

Another member shared some follow-up that the responses to the rider experience survey may not be representative of the broader, more diverse community. The member asked how staff could encourage more diversity in survey takers and how to share messaging (this will be on the next month agenda).

One member shared a personal example of safety experience on taking the East Link Starter Line on the east side and that they saw transit officers at every stop. The member asked if there is the same level of security at other stations. Board member Walker shared there is a need to balance the number of security officers and Link ambassadors so it does not give the perception that there is increased safety concerns because of a large security presence, but there have been investments in increasing security. She also shared there are regular ambassadors in Tacoma now with the system extension.

Another member asked how the roll out of the fare ambassadors and fare enforcement has gone. Sound Transit is getting quarterly updates, and while there is an on-going challenge to have enough staff for enforcement, there are positive anecdotal reports that fare enforcement has been working with people. The member asked if riders have found it a hassle to have to show fare? Board member Walker hasn't heard it has been.

Another member shared a story that she's seen people avoiding fare enforcement during a transit security ride along. They asked what else is Sound Transit doing to keep the area around the stations safe? The safety incidences don't just happen in the trains (shared example of the recent stabbing). Board member Walker shared that it's a little different for each jurisdiction and agency depending on the partnership with Sound Transit.

Board member Walker encouraged folks to reach out to her at [Kristina.walker@cityoftacoma.org](mailto:Kristina.walker@cityoftacoma.org).

### **Introduction to Interim CEO Goran Sparrman**

- Goran Sparrman – Interim CEO

Interim CEO Goran Sparrman opened with appreciation of being here and the importance of the COP's work. Interim CEO Sparrman was previously the Bellevue transportation director, managed the Seattle transportation department; and was VP of business development at HNTB; he's had a mix of public and private sector work experience over the years. He's been in this position since the beginning of the year and shared an overview of the work and where the organization is. The board formed a technical advisory group (TAG) to focus on capital delivery and provide recommendations to the agency. Recommendations include how to shape the culture in the agency to move work forward on such large-scale capital projects (Sound Transit has the largest transit expansion program in the country). One challenge is knowing what improvements Sound Transit wants, but how to prioritize those. Interim CEO Sparrman works with a cabinet made up of department leads to manage the agency and help break down silos so staff can work together more effectively and improve decision making. The agency is conducting a function analysis so staff have more clarity and understanding of their work and role; this is planned to be completed in the next few months.

Capital program updates included the East Link Starter Line opening earlier in April and an anticipation that ridership will grow 10-fold once it connects across I-90 at the Chinatown/ID station; construction challenges which delayed the connection and pushed the target open date to fall of 2025; upcoming traffic challenges on northbound I-5 from a WSDOT project which will reduce two lanes indefinitely, Sound Transit is planning for increased ridership due to the increase of construction work on I-5 and will store additional trains to meet anticipated demand; and beginning to expand eastside Link to Redmond downtown in spring 2025.

Planning updates focused on the West Seattle and Ballard expansion work. Sound Transit decided not to adopt the changes studied for the Preferred Alternative of the Ballard Link Extension in the South Lake Union area. It expects to begin working with property owners soon in West Seattle.

Interim CEO Sparrman shared that Sound Transit is one of the safest transit systems of its size in the country. However, perceptions of safety are still important and there have recently been several safety concerns. Sound Transit has quadrupled its safety force, there are about 500 staff in the system that work in shifts. Sound Transit worked with a national security consulting firm three months ago to evaluate the system and ask if Sound Transit is deploying security in the optimal way and are there other gaps to consider on the trains themselves and platforms.

A member shared there have been some construction challenges that have caused delays (i.e., I-90 issues and tiles on the Eastside) and asked how inspection would be improved. Interim CEO Sparrman shared lessons learned to have redundancy in quality inspection and assurance and the need to have resources to independently inspect work to prevent another situation like I-90.

Another member asked if things are tracking pretty well on STRIDE on the eastside. Interim CEO Sparrman replied overall yes, but there are some challenges with community engagement and target dates are still achievable. This work is connected with WSDOT work as well and there is a projected start date for the SR522/NE 145th St. project in 2028 and I-405 project in 2029.

A member asked about the situation in the CID. Interim CEO Sparrman replied that it's nuanced, there are different construction options around the CID. The board recommended keeping the CID north and south, but the community felt like that bypassed the heart of the CID. Staff have been exploring three different options on 4<sup>th</sup> Ave and expect to present to the board in the fall. There was a follow-up question of building the trust between the board and Sound Transit. Interim CEO Sparrman shared he's working to bring information early and completely to the board to build the trust, one thing that's helped is including staff recommendations for project decisions. He's gotten positive feedback about this approach.

One member asked about change management and changes in senior leadership, how to manage different visions of different people and longevity of changes. Interim CEO Sparrman shared that he's implementing drastic changes to show that things can change and there is follow through. The cabinet structure (7 department heads + CEO) helps staff feel ownership of the agency as a whole and helps maintain stability and investment in the agency over time.

Another member shared concerns about labor shortages and rising costs and that Sound Transit has had conversations about apprenticeships to help increase workforce for the agency and for other civil engineering projects. Interim CEO Sparrman acknowledged there was turnover of staff who led this work last year, but he is very invested in growing this especially through DEI work to not only support the agency's own needs, but also the greater industry needs.

A member asked about the FTA and if Sound Transit is building a good relationship with FTA to get funding. Interim CEO Sparrman shared that the relationship with FTA has been strained over the past few years, but he is now meeting regularly with the Regional FTA Administrator and met with the acting FTA administrator. Interim CEO Sparrman is also working closely with congressional delegation; he has some concerns about November and how the upcoming elections could impact funding.

A member asked about the value and limitation of comparing different agency data. Interim CEO Sparrman shared that it's helpful to learn lessons from one another, but understands that it's important to compare apples to apples.

A member asked if there is a fundamental reason for shifting the fare recovery goal to about half of what it is. Interim CEO Sparrman shared that the data the agency used before was 15 or 20 years old, so the fare recovery rates were realigned to be more reasonable in current circumstances. Fare ambassadors are now active on the platforms and about 60% of riders pay; anticipating that the percentage will increase. Another member asked about implementing gates and bars like other systems, and interim CEO Sparrman replied it would be about \$2 billion dollars to update the system.

A member asked how the process is going to find a new CEO. Interim CEO Sparrman anticipates it will take several months to find the right fit to have stability in the agency.

A member asked what has been surprising or strengths that interim CEO Sparrman has seen in his few months in the position. He responded the strength of Sound Transit staff, staff are your primary resource to deliver a good project. Also, the public support is strong and he hears positive feedback. Challenges include processes (i.e., quality assurance and procurement processes),but he appreciates the support from the TAG and board. There was a follow-up question of what the agency can do better to support and empower staff from historically marginalized groups. Sound Transit has several ERGs (employee resource groups) and is an industry leader in supporting diverse staff and giving groups voice; and there is a focus to create psychological safety, for example that staff aren't afraid of retaliation if they speak up about something.

Interim CEO Sparrman is open to returning in a few months to have another conversation with the COP.

### **Operations and Maintenance Facility South Project Update**

- Curvie Hawkins – Project Development Director – High Capacity Transit

Staff shared that he has been with Sound Transit for 6.5 years, hailing from Texas. This presentation is what will be shared to the System Expansion Committee tomorrow (6/13/24) and he is taking a recommendation to the board for the facility to be built. Staff shared an overview of the three proposed sites - South 336th St at Christian Faith Center in Federal Way (preferred alternative), South 344th St alternative in Federal Way, and Midway Landfill alternative in Kent) - evaluated in the final EIS (environmental impact statement). Staff also needed to complete a NEPA (National Environmental Protection Act) process to pursue federal grants and funding. The board selected South 336th St as the preferred alternative. The South 344th St alternative also would require a connecting mainline track like the preferred alternative and the Midway Landfill would need to consider stabilizing the soil underneath the site to build upon if this was selected.

The comparison of key findings slides presented includes a shaded bar to represent the impacts of the connecting mainline track. The South 344th St alternative would displace the most businesses, including four churches and Ellenos yogurt. The board approved moving forward with acquiring needed property (for any of the proposed alternatives) from Belmor Park which would lead to displacing some mobile homes. When the facility opens is an important factor because it impacts when the facility can receive vehicles to get them ready for service. Probable costs don't include the connecting tracks and are at a 10% design level. There are fairly similar annual operating cost estimates for each alternative. Sound Transit Board approved early acquisition of Christian Faith Center and there was support from the pastor to move forward so the church could plan for future needs. Negotiations with the Church are ongoing. There has been engagement with the community throughout the process and the agency has gathered community feedback and input. A Facility Equity Analysis was completed and found while there would be shorter term disruptions, the benefits would compensate for/outweigh long-term negative impacts - benefits include work opportunities including construction jobs and about 600 new permanent jobs.

A member asked if the 600 new jobs are during the construction phase or in operations and are there priority local hires. The over 600 jobs is the number of permanent jobs, the people working out of the facilities. Staff have had conversations about the priority hires and hiring people from the area, but are unsure if that is possible to guarantee. Staff are planning to have training space and programs in the new facility, which may increase likelihood of people training coming to work in the facility. The member shared an example of priority hires based on someone's zip code in Snohomish County; the County passing an ordinance to include zip code for priority hires. The member would share the example with staff.

Another member asked if the key findings/factors are weighted differently to help make the preferred alternative decision. Staff responded that the EIS itself does not provide a recommendation, its purpose is to provide facts on impacts and mitigation and is in general neutral. The resolution coming to the board, however, does include a staff recommendation and a rationale; staff selected a preferred alternative of South 336th St, which aligns with the board recommendation.

A member asked how many people are working on the project team and the budget amount up to groundbreaking. Staff can get the org chart and share with the COP.

- \$394,360 million is current authorized project allocation (budget) for OMF South (today's budget, not the full cost of the project)
- The Opinion of Probable Cost Estimate to build the project is approximately \$1.9 billion

Staff share that for the preferred alternative, they would need to build a larger truck overhaul shop for operational productivity and extend local streets to help with city permitting.

A member asked what the options are for reducing impacts to wetlands and mitigation costs with the preferred alternative. Staff responded they are trying to squeeze the project between wetlands associated with the east and west Hylebos Creek within what is reasonable and possible for the project.

A member asked about the high budget for the right-of-way and staff responded that it's for the early acquisition of Christian Faith Center that the board approved; early acquisition can impact project schedule because negotiations can be a long process, so they are working to get ahead of that.

### **Discussion, Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary, Member Reports**

The May 6 meeting summary was approved.

Audio is much better now in the room, people online can hear everyone around the table.

Scott shared appreciation for Goran's presentation and planning for Sound Transit; a lot of work for having only been in the position for five months.

Tina and Lucas commented about a potential challenge for fare ambassadors enforcing fares on the platform and attempting to stop people from boarding if they don't pay.

Charlotte recommended creating an acronyms cheat sheet to share with everyone to help understand what staff means when they use acronyms

- **Adam** will send Nancy the board manual to share the list of acronyms

Adam reminded folks about the Lynnwood Link Extension site visit on Friday, 6/14.

**Next Meeting:** Wednesday, July 10, 2024, 5:30 – 8:15 PM

- 2024 Annual Program Review
- NTD Data Review and Analysis
  - National Transit Data
  - Looking at construction
- Workforce Development and Apprenticeship Program Update