

Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

September 11, 2024

COP Members Present: Linda Dorris, Paul Thompson, Scott Lampe, Zak Osborne, Tina Pierce, James Peyton, Lucas Simons, Lorenzo Frazier, Mark Lewington, Tom Norcott, Charlotte Murry

COP Members Absent: Diana Cambronero Venegas, Trevor Reed, Donia Zaheri

Others Present: Adam Montee, Katie Flores, Nancy Thai

At-Grade Crossing Program Update

- Branden Porter, Acting Chief Safety Officer
- Victoria Morris, Acting Project Director
- Anna Huntington, Deputy Director of Safety

Staff provided an overview of the At-Grade Crossing Program. It was created to enhance safety at at-grade crossings. The initial focus was on the Rainier Valley; there have been 11 Sound Transit fatalities over the years. The Sound Transit safety department is bound by regulatory standards, formed at the end of 2021. The program has conducted safety studies to help inform safety strategies, and partnered with SDOT on several completed projects. Completed project types include train enhancements, signage enhancements, pavement markings, and traffic signal enhancement. Staff continue to build other partnerships to continue improving safety of at-grade crossings.

Staff then shared updates on active projects: Link alignment corridor update, automatic pedestrian (auto-ped) gates at station locations, and paint to enhance trackway visibility. The Link alignment project will bring newly adopted agency standards to existing crossing at MLK and SODO. The automatic pedestrian gates are a pilot and staff will bring back an update on delivery timeline in October. The program is currently and will continue to pursue grant opportunities to fund this work as it is a high priority for the agency.

Next steps include the program team returning to the Board in October and November. Staff are working on near-term projects while also identifying and evaluating mid- and long-term projects for strategic planning. Staff are also working on a program website to launch in the next couple of weeks. Program staff are conducting a corridor analysis to learn about incidences and efficacy of treatments implemented. Community engagement is an important element of this safety work, especially reaching people who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), low-income, and underserved. Staff understand the importance of going to where community members are and implementing “offline” methods to reach people by bringing survey questions to events like fairs and festivals to gather public feedback and partnering with community organizations. Staff do not want to make people come to Sound Transit, but rather offer ways for people to engage when and where they can.

One member shared that the public discussion of the Rainier Valley keeps coming back to whether to try to grade-separate the line, but the cost seems prohibitive without another vote. Have staff found any alternatives that might make this possible? Staff are able to move forward mid- and long-term projects with longer-term corridor improvements. The Board has requested an at-grade cross program master plan, including how Sound Transit engages with partners and communities. Staff are presenting about their work on a master to the Board in October and a system-wide master plan in November.

A member asked if staff could comment on the feasibility of physical crossing gates, as are found on railroads in most places. This is highly variable as it depends on many factors, such as traffic, infrastructure to allow a gate, and noise impact considerations. Staff are collaborating with Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and advancing design for automated pedestrian gates at Rainier Valley stations as a pilot. SDOT would need to lead a feasibility study and partner with Sound Transit to consider vehicles gates.

Members asked about Sound Transit's safety experience of at-grade crossings compared with other transit agencies that have on-street operations without any physical separation, such as SF Muni and MBTA (Boston). It is standard practice to conduct peer reviews of other agencies. Compared to others, Sound Transit has generally fewer at-grade crossings, but rates middle of the pack when it comes to number of collisions. The agency has room to learn more from other transit agencies.

A member asked if the COP could get a copy of the master plan presentation staff are bringing to the Board in October. Staff are taking an initial iteration to the Board in October, but will update the master plan and come back to the Board. Staff will share it with the COP once it's presented to the Board.

A member asked how many of the 11 fatalities were in the Rainier Valley. Of the 11, 8 were in Rainier Valley – 1 was an instance of the train striking vehicle and the rest were pedestrians.

A member asked if there was any pushback from nearby neighbors when Sound Transit increased the volume of the bells. There was not. Staff are balancing the need for awareness and knowing that people live in the area and could be impacted by the sound. Staff conducted a noise study to explore high bell (6 a.m. to 10 p.m.) and low bell options (after 10 p.m. and before 6 a.m.). They saw that high and low bell sound timing aligns with the ambient noises that already occur in the neighborhood.

One member was curious about the cost of these safety concerns and incidents and how to balance enacting safety measures that might not be popular with residents. Staff are driven by continuous monitoring of safety and need for action after an incident, not necessarily the cost of a safety treatment. Sound Transit has teams assigned to different geographic areas and they respond after a safety incidence to conduct a complete hazard analysis and investigate. The safety department conducts preliminary hazard analyses before fare service begins on a route and develops mitigations, incorporating lessons learned.

A member asked if the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regulates Sound Transit. Yes, the FTA regulates the Link, while the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is the regulatory body for Sounder. Sound Transit conducts self-audits and external audits. Staff monitor and evaluate the system every 3 months. The At-Grade Cross Program was born from this continual evaluation and monitoring and seeing trends over time.

Another safety project underway is grant-funded work to demonstrate emerging technology in the transportation industry. One new tool is video analytics monitoring to focus safety treatments and gather more information about what is happening in the environment, even when trains are not around. Staff would get more data around near-misses to be better able to see any trends. Video analytics would be placed higher on poles to have greater field-of-view, as opposed to trains, which currently have cameras on them, having a more limited field-of-view.

One member asked how many of the 11 fatalities was Sound Transit at fault? Do not have that data, staff would need to ask legal team for that information.

A member asked what Sound Transit is asking in their community engagement. One question asks if people notice the treatments and what their impacts are. Another question asks how Sound Transit's communications are. There are also open-ended questions to ask for general feedback.

Part of the program's master plan is expanding community engagement to inform planning, and asking questions where people can actually have influence. Staff will also offer listening sessions for communities that prefer to engage in that way.

One member asked how these projects consider people with disabilities and engage with them. In the last phase of engagement in 2021 and 2022, staff developed a survey around usability and accessibility for all. Evaluation criteria include a lens of accessibility for all in prioritizing projects. Staff gather information about the neighborhood, like if there's a Lighthouse for the Blind or language access needs to have survey available in languages used by a community.

The Othello and Columbia City gates timeline are through 30% conceptual design. Stadium station is at full 100% design completed this year, but staff need to decide on construction delivery. Staff are working to accelerate projects to delivery. Rainier Beach is in early design, because it is more complex, it is at about 10% design. Data showed a need to prioritize Othello and Columbia City.

A member asked how community input impacted Stadium design because it's already at 100% design. Stadium design responds to surge crowds and volumes, and aligns with more recent design criteria updates from 2023. The data drove the prioritization of that station. Staff will conduct engagement and communications this winter and look to engage with the community about whether Sound Transit's prioritization is aligned with the community's expectations.

Bus Rapid Transit Program Update

- Bernard van de Kamp, Program Executive-Bus Rapid Transit

The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) program is on budget and schedule. There is a lot of construction underway, and lots of challenges on the S3 corridor – sequencing of right-of-way, permitting, and some community opposition.

Stride BRT will be comprised of 3 lines: S1- Burien to Bellevue, S2 – Lynnwood to Bellevue, S3 - Bothell to Shoreline. BRT will provide speed and reliability, 10-minute frequency on S3, 10-minute frequency during peak times on I-405, and 15 minutes on other periods; riders won't need a schedule. BRT will be faster between Lynnwood and Bellevue (35 minutes on BRT) than taking the Link.

BRT will be an all-electric fleet. It is trying to maximize off-board fare payment, so people aren't crowding to pay on board, and will have bicycle accommodations.

Bus Base North will be the first project to be completed in 2027, then S3 line (Q2 2028), then S1 (Q3 2028), then S2 (Q2 2029). BRT is doing well schedule-wise when looking at the schedule without float, except S3 which is experiencing challenges. The estimated costs are close to the budget.

Bus Base North will be able to accommodate 120 coaches and will have overnight charging. The BRT program will have approximately 50 coaches and the bus base will also house Sound Transit Express coaches that are currently operated by Community Transit (Community Transit does not currently appear interested in continuing to operate Sound Transit buses). Bus Base North is oversized for immediate needs, but will accommodate growth. It will be an operations station, and thus requires a large parking structure, and space for a fully electric BRT fleet and diesel fueling for ST Express coaches. Some of the

Sound Transit Express routes will be replaced by BRT and those coaches will be repurposed. There will be inductive charging opportunities at the end of routes (i.e., Shoreline, Bothell, Burien, Lynnwood, Bellevue) so coaches can get some charging in as to not be completely drained as they head back to the bus base. Wenatchee is an example of another transit agency using inductive charging.

One member asked if staff have any concerns about getting the fleet in time for opening. No, the entire fleet was ordered last December and is going into production soon. Staff expect to get the first coaches about a year out to test them.

The BRT fleet costs over \$100M from two vendors. Building the bus base and an electric fleet is new for Sound Transit. People can see project construction work already, especially along I-405. Sound Transit is partnering with WSDOT to build in-line stations along I-405 at Canyon Park, Bothell, Brickyard, NE 85th, and NE 44th, and with cities to build roundabouts, like on NE 145th St.

A member asked if the design of the new buses will accommodate people who are travelling and have large baggage. Sound Transit is working with the bus manufacturers to incorporate a designated luggage area on the coaches.

Staff showed photos of recent progress on Stride. There will be express toll lanes (with variable tolls) on both northbound and southbound I-405 on the S1 Line segment as these are important for buses to maintain speed and reliability (slide 7 in the presentation).

The S2 Line segment will feature a direct access ramp and BRT station at NE 85th interchange in Kirkland (slide 8 in the presentation). This is a 3-level interchange to separate out transit on the middle level and it will be shared with express toll lane users. While it is expensive to build, it will cost \$300M, the cost is actually a little lower than what was anticipated in ST3.

Further north on the S2 Line segment, there will be new in-line BRT stations at Brickyard and Canyon Park. At the SR 522/I-405 interchange, the BRT station will be in the center with a direct access ramp (slide 9 in the presentation). This build is complex because of crossing the river and geotechnical work that needs to be done for an unstable slope. There will be 2 express toll lanes in each direction.

In the City of Bothell, the BRT program funded a City-led reconstruction of NE 185th St as part of future S3 line, on route to UW Bothell. Sound Transit helped pay for this work since the road was originally designed to be more of a neighborhood road and it was in poor condition.

The S1 Line was supposed to have an in-line station at Tukwila International Blvd (TIB), but the State discovered an existing culvert in poor shape and it posed a risk to Sound Transit to move forward. The culvert needs to be replaced to be fish passable and it would be very expensive to move forward. Sound Transit does not have the funds to do that, so a temporary fix is to serve the Tukwila Link Station with BRT, though this adds 6 minutes to travel time. The culvert failed last June and a sinkhole appeared and is in emergency repairs now. It may take 5 years to fix and so there is the interim station until the in-line station can be completed.

A member asked how people will get from the Link to the BRT, especially if they're travelling from SeaTac Airport. The BRT will be faster than the Link between SeaTac and Bellevue. People would take the 1 Link from the airport, get off at the Tukwila station and take an escalator or elevator to the interim BRT station. When the permanent in-line station is built, there will be a pedestrian bridge, about 100-200 feet long, from the mezzanine to connect to BRT.

Staff have a requests out for service providers (could be national or international providers). There are seven more large procurements yet to be advertised. A note on acronyms on slide 12 of the presentation: GCCM – general construction manager and IFB – issue for bid.

The schedule float is very low on S3 Line, there are over 220 parcels rights needed or temporary construction easements, and there is some opposition, especially in Lake Forest Park, to this project. Staff are trying to find solutions and have already made changes to design stemming from concern over removing trees and the need to build retaining walls. Some cities, including Lake Forest Park, will not accept permit applications until all property rights are acquired. The project is on budget right now, but it's tight. Staff are anxious to see response to requests for proposals. Another challenge is the bus layover at the Bellevue library. The use of the layover site is controlled by the city because it is in city right of way. Sound Transit needs a permanent spot and believes it has a path forward with Bellevue.

Station names have been proposed and were informed by outreach to communities. Staff collaborated with communities and city partners to have clear names denoting where stops are, with S3 having more conventional bus route names.

A member asked about the forecasted ridership on BRT. S3 is forecasted (year 2042) for 9,000 per day, and S1 and S2 will have a combined 26,000.

There is a bid out to vendors to operate the fleet and staff have heard prior to launching procurement that King County might have some interest in operating the system (which includes drivers, dispatch, supervisors, mechanics, etc.). It is going to the Board for award early next year.

The BRT routes were defined in the ST3 package. The Sound Transit express routes were originally intended to build a market for high frequency service and high-capacity transit line (like light rail or BRT). BRT will replace several 500 series routes, for example, the Sound Transit Express 522 route on SR 522 will be replaced by BRT.

Transit-Oriented Development Program Update

- Thatcher Imboden, Director of Community Development Office

Staff shared an overview of Sound Transit's Transit-Oriented Development (TOD). The Board adopted the equitable TOD policy after ST3. Sound Transit cares about TOD and partnerships with affordable housing because this influences ridership and people living near transit can ride. TOD wants to support growth with Sound Transit property and understand how to improve access to stations.

Sound Transit buys property for stations and with surplus land, can redevelop that land. Sometimes Sound Transit can build on top of a station if it's underground. Local jurisdictions and agencies shape development around station areas.

Most projects are adjacent developments, built next to each other, but not dependent on one another. Integrated projects are more complicated because whatever is happening on the bottom floor influences everything above it. Joint developments takes a lot of intentionality. The U District station has an office building on top of the station that is just about complete. It is the first integrated project for Sound Transit. The Capitol Hill station is an example of air rights development.

About 2,700 of the nearly 3,500 housing units being developed in partnership with Sound Transit is affordable housing. When Sound Transit went to the WA legislation to seek authorization to go to the voters for ST3, one expectation was to use majority of surplus property for affordable housing ($\geq 80\%$),

≥80% of those housing units needed to be affordable at ≤80% Area Median Income (AMI) or below. The property can be sold or leased to developers, but the Board is able to subsidize the cost of land so affordable housing is possible. Sound Transit is currently exceeding minimums, but the Board will have challenges in providing more affordable housing in the future.

A member asked how the agency works to keep land from being sold at market rate if it was initially bought at a subsidized price from Sound Transit. Affordable rental housing is income restricted (HUD established rent limits). When it comes to affordable homeownership, like in Seattle, the city will oversee that and can use methods like a land trust model (caps on appreciation allowed so others can afford homeownership if a house is sold).

A member asked if there are education programs for homebuyers. Yes, that work is mainly done through non-profit organizations to reach underrepresented groups.

There are three major phases of TOD: station design – urban design and future planning and infrastructure collaboration with jurisdictions; explore opportunities – explore station configurations to minimize unusable land; and TOD implementation – work with partners to implement the TOD.

There are several factors impacting upcoming projects. Staff must consider local infrastructure and building new facilities in communities that are expected to change over time, e.g., blocks need to be subdivided with streets, water needs and impacts, sidewalks needed, etc. Jurisdictions don't always have the funding to build the infrastructure and ask developers to cover some costs which can lead to tension. Staff consider prioritization of public benefits. There are many needs, but staff have to balance competing interests, e.g., infrastructure costs and affordable housing and both are subsidized. Another consideration is funding for affordable housing. Sound Transit can give away property, but need it to be developed. The agency tries to align its resources and priorities with state departments so people have opportunities to develop (i.e., Sound Transit has land, Dept. of Commerce has money). Zoning is another factor, where the agency and developer may want retail on the ground floor, but there is not always the market for that. Sound Transit needs to consider heights and design now, but current zoning codes might change over time. Additional factors for joint development are considering increased project costs when designing stations to carry heavier loads and designing now, which may lock in a design type.

Staff shared representative completed projects. For the U District Station, the University of Washington (UW) wanted to keep the property. Thus, Sound Transit only purchased the subterranean area and property to get in and out of the station. UW paid for Sound Transit to reinforce the station to hold more weight and then built on top of it. The U District Station Building is primarily office space that UW rents out.

At the Capitol Hill station, there is a four-building development. The developer built a plaza on top of the station. It was important to the community to include a permanent farmers market space. Buildings are at over 85% occupancy.

Cedar Crossing at the Roosevelt station was a discounted property so the city could develop affordable housing. All 254 units, studio to two-bedrooms, are affordable and El Centro de la Raza has a daycare center there. Staff are seeing more fully affordable housing with day care model developments.

There are three phases in evaluating TOD potential during planning: phase 1 – explore redevelopment opportunities; phase 2 - refine opportunities that exist and engage with the community more; phase 3 - preliminary design to minimize undevelopable remnants.

West Seattle and Ballard will have joint development project opportunities, which means there will be challenges typical of these types of development. Design challenges include having to make assumptions,

considering loading zones, trash pick-ups, and how people will practically use the space. In preparation for joint development projects, staff run cost benefit analyses and see industry input. One example is partnering with Urban Land Institute, who brings together architects, engineers, and designers to talk about assumptions and provide opportunity to bring cities into the development conversation.

A member asked if there is still interest in TOD. There is still interest in TOD, there are 70,000 to 90,000 riders daily. Travel behavior is changing, but people are still using transit and developers are still interested. Development is challenging though, it's impacted by interest rates and land cost and rental rates are not increasing substantially. Developers are preparing for the next opportunity to develop. Housing is a hot political topic, and regulatory relief may be coming for housing development. Permitting can take a long time, especially in this region, where permitting approval can take up to 24 months, which is a long time to have capital tied up. People are trying to understand COVID-era policy impacts (capital and operational regulations) which were intended to help people stay housed during the pandemic, but sometimes led to developers struggling financially from not being paid by renters.

A member asked about the benefits of TOD for Sound Transit. Typically cited response is ridership and value capture through long-term ground leases or one-time sales of property. Studies have shown that property value can increase with transit, but it can also lead to displacement, and so it is Sound Transit's responsibility to help mitigate that displacement.

A member asked whether more housing will be developed if more transit is built. Market-rate housing will come, but staff are thinking about tools to leverage developers, for example exchanging an up zone if a developer will include affordable housing.

One member asked about the Fife station and potential locations. Staff are still in station location alternatives planning, but are working with the city.

Another member ask if TOD is considering different types of services in the TOD areas, like including healthcare, child care, educational facilities, groceries. Staff want to encourage developers to build those, and are trying to figure out how to facilitate those outcomes, but it is challenging.

Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary, Member Reports

A member asked about the Rainier Valley master plan at-grade crossing and an eye-tracking study.

A member was disappointed about the response to the question about community engagement done for the Stadium at-grade crossing treatment during the At-Grade Crossing Program Update presentation.

Motion to approve August meeting summary, seconded, no opposed, approved.

Several members made it to do the Lynnwood ribbon cutting, it was very crowded. It only took 30 minutes from Capitol Hill to Lynnwood, but crowded due to Metallica concert.

A member asked if we can get the "1" pins from the celebration.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, October 9, 2024, 5:30 – 8:15 PM

- Passenger Experience Survey Results
- West Seattle Link Extension Update
- Internal Audit Division Update