

Sound Transit Community Oversight Panel Hybrid Meeting Summary

July 12, 2023

COP Members Present: James Peyton, Paul Thompson, Lucas Simons, Tom Norcott, Tina Pierce, Helen Powell, Donia Zaheri, Scott Lampe, Diana Cambronero Venegas, Joe Scorcio, Carston Curd, Charlotte Murry

COP Members Absent: Lorenzo Frazier, Gabriel Clark

Others Present: Adam Montee, Kathy Albert, Chris Hoffman

Racial Equity Toolkit Use in Project Planning

- Nicole Hill – Director, Equity and Social Responsibility
- Martha Russell – High-Capacity Transit Project Manager

Sound Transit staff began by introducing the agenda for the presentation and then provided a history of the Racial Equity Toolkit (RET), which was first drafted in 2020. The Equity office opened in 2017. The toolkit was piloted in 2020-2021, which led to a revision of the toolkit, which then resulted in publishing the toolkit in 2022. Staff then reviewed the anti-racist vision statement, which was the result of the agency committing to being an anti-racist organization. Staff then discussed the anti-racist guiding principles, which covered topics including disrupting racism, partnering with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, intersectionality, leadership transformation, and sustained commitment.

Staff described the RET as a tool for analysis that includes a set of guiding questions that force staff to slow down when implementing their projects, plans, and policies. It involves collecting data and examining who benefits or is burdened by specific decisions. Staff provided an outline of the tool, which is an adaptive approach with steps and questions for teams to consider as they make decisions. Beyond decisions, it is about building capacity within Sound Transit to proactively center racial equity in conversations. Staff then reviewed past, current, and future RET efforts, and provided examples of specific projects.

Staff explained how RET is being applied to the Everett Link Extension Project, which is a 16-mile, 7 station project targeted to open in the 2037-2041 timeframe. The project also includes an Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF) and parking facilities. The project is currently in the planning process and just completed Phase 1: alternatives development process. The project team defined phase 1 RET goals, which are intended to elevate explicit consideration of racial equity in the Board's identification of alternatives for study in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). There are three goals on topics that include research, engagement, and alternatives evaluation. Staff provided an example of how they evaluated alternatives through an equity lens, which led to outcomes that identified equity advantages and disadvantages for each alternative and elevated equity issues important to communities and bolstered access to decision-making.

A COP member asked about how the RET and whether the analysis that was done has been effective at altering decisions. Staff responded with an example of how the Evergreen Station had alternatives with direct displacement and gentrification issues, which led to a decision to consider other potentially less impactful alternatives. Another member asked about potential conflicts balancing displacement and providing access to transit. Staff responded that one way they are trying to plan ahead is through a grant to look at city codes and how they may currently discourage development around transit and how those codes could better encourage anti-displacement strategies. The tool helps the agency to be proactive

rather than reactive because it surfaces tradeoffs that inform decision-making. Another member asked about the work being done by consultants and contractors and how the RET gets ingrained in their work. Staff replied that consultants and contractors have adopted and engaged with the RET based on guidance and agreements with Sound Transit. The agency also makes sure consultants and contractors are aligned with its values through the contracting process. A member asked about how the tool is used in human resources and performance management. Staff replied they are in the early stages and that the goal is to have it applied by the end of the year and to ensure that performance management considers equity. A member asked about the Community Advisory Group (CAG) and what the process is to get that group familiar with the RET. Staff responded that through 7 meetings in phase 1 the CAG's focus was on decision making. Staff introduced the RET as part of the planning process, and the CAG engaged with it through review and discussion of equity findings in alternatives evaluation and public input. A member commented that the CAG members don't necessarily represent the entire community and asked how Sound Transit gets them to buy into the RET approach. Staff said that the RET process and equity discussions went smoothly with the CAG and that there were members that represented every station along the alignment. The demographics of the project area and the CAG membership demographics were similar, and, while this is not a complete picture of equity in CAG membership, it is an indication of improvement.

Long Term Light Rail Vehicle Supply and Storage

- Matt Shelden – Deputy Executive Director for Planning and Integration

Staff began by discussing the fleet forecast and the challenges they face associated with that forecast. They have identified factors that affect the operation of the system. Staff then reviewed assumptions related to service levels, OMF capacity and timing, and fleet expansion and replacement. These cover topics related to providing six-minute headway service, current OMF facilities, and the number of vehicles they currently have (214 by 2025) and that they have plans for 460 vehicles by the time ST3 is fully implemented. Staff said they are responding to evolving conditions, which include slower operations, maintenance, and unknown future needs.

Staff said that for the Northgate Extension they estimated the agency needed 74 vehicles, but they are currently using 92 vehicles. Big picture, Sound Transit originally estimated needing 460 vehicles total for the complete ST3 system, and now they project that need to be 550 vehicles. In summary, they have reduced flexibility over the next 5-10 years in the current plan and are short about 90 vehicles in the long term. As Sound Transit needs more vehicles, they will also need more OMF capacity to service and store the vehicles. In summary, the agency will be short about 50 to 60 spaces over the long term. The current plan will not support all planned service and the planned OMF facilities will not support the larger fleet needed to provide all planned service.

Staff said they are working on a plan to mitigate the shortages, including adjusting levels of service and lowering the spare ratio for vehicles. Other options include finding efficiencies within the system, although that alone will not solve the problem. The Board could decide to purchase more vehicles. There are uncertainties around ridership levels, changes in running times, and changes in space needed at OMFs. They are moving forward with near-term options for the Board to consider and provide direction on.

A panel member asked how many OMFs are operational right now and how many will operate in the future. Staff replied that there are two operating today in SODO and Bellevue (Bellevue is not completely available yet). OMF South and OMF North are currently being planned, with the south site selected and the north site still in alternatives evaluation. A member asked about ridership and the possibility of borrowing vehicles from other agencies. Staff responded that Sound Transit runs on a 1500-volt system and other systems across the country do not. There are also other major differences among cars in

different systems that make borrowing cars unrealistic. Sound Transit is looking at adding a few more cars to their current order with Siemens. A member asked about rider demand and if that will be lower in areas beyond the central service area. Staff said that there may be flexibility to reduce service levels in some areas and they need to determine how much service is needed and where based on updated ridership forecasts. A member asked about the series 1 cars and projections about how well they are lasting and how that affects their planning. Staff said the series 1 cars have been operating reliably since 2009. However, Sound Transit is having a hard time keeping cars clean and they are having to take more cars out of service than expected to keep them clean. They are also not able to commission the series 2 cars as quickly as they would like, which is affecting service. A member asked if systems around the country are experiencing similar maintenance and commissioning issues. Staff said that many transit agencies are experiencing similar problems. Sound Transit is a relatively new light rail operating agency and is experiencing some growing pains. A member asked what happens to the series 1 cars when they are decommissioned. Staff said Sound Transit surpluses them, and they typically find that rail cars typically last 30 years; staff said they can follow up with a more specific answer about where surplus cars end up.

Real Property Market Tracking and Property Acquisition Process

- Faith Roland – Director of Real Property

Staff began by talking about the real property team and the acquisition and relocation process. There are 2,000 properties that need to be acquired over the next several years. Staff talked about the role of the real property team, which is to treat people with respect and consistency, that they are aware they are spending tax dollars. Staff then talked about the real property team, which includes 27 staff and up to 60 consultants. The team gets involved in the planning phase, but they don't start acquiring land until the design is sufficient to know what the property needs are. They also have a property management team to secure and protect the property before they build on it.

Staff then reviewed a series of guidance policies that govern their work. The board authorizes all acquisitions and eminent domain processes. The agency is also directed by State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); there almost always has to be a Record of Decision (ROD) before acquisitions can happen. There are three types of acquisition; full, partial, and temporary (they only acquire what is needed). In most cases the property is not on the market. Staff reviewed the acquisition steps, which include appraisals, determining just compensation and making a written offer, relocations and acquisition assistance, displacing tenants/occupants, negotiating in good faith, providing displacee advisory services and providing statutory notice at all steps along the way. The agency also assists landowners and displacees, provides translation, provides reimbursement for offer review, covers accounting fees, advances payment for some relocation assistance, and provides move expense reimbursement.

Staff then reviewed the total number of acquisitions, relocations, and condemnations. Out of over 1,000 acquisitions they have only condemned about 1% of all properties. For ST3 they will have 500-700 acquisitions and other projects have significant acquisitions as well. The average acquisition takes 18-24 months. In some instances, they apply for early acquisitions for corridor preservation purposes. They also convey facilities to other entities, including utilities and WSDOT. Staff reiterated how they always treat people with respect and consistency. Staff then answered questions previously provided by the COP. The first question was, can they expedite the acquisition process. Staff said they can if there is a hardship exemption. The second question was how can they select alternatives sooner. Staff said that Real Property does not make that decision, but can help inform it. Another question was about buying property in advance, like Sound Transit did with OMF east. Staff said that in rare circumstances they can get a categorical exclusion for a protected purchase. There was another question about preemptive purchasing.

Staff said they recently leased a property while doing due diligence and created an option to purchase later. The last previously provided question was how Sound Transit prioritizes properties and how do they determine where to spend their time. Staff said that is their biggest challenge; they do prioritize with the construction team, for example if they want to start construction on one side of a roadway first. They also prioritize complex purchases.

A COP member asked how they do appraisals when properties have adverse conditions around them and does the seller get enough money to buy other properties that aren't near adverse conditions. Staff said they value properties based on comparable conditions and they also pay for relocation, mortgage differential, closing costs, and there is also a means to cover additional costs of a comparable home if it now costs more than the original piece of property. A member asked if some of the owners want to move anyway and are willing to work with Sound Transit and if they often want to speed up the process. Staff said they can expedite the relocation process while the rest of the process plays out. Another member asked if the department is involved with the rights of access and other preliminary work. Staff said they are involved with getting rights of entry and access for all types of surveys and testing. A COP member commented about what is happening in West Seattle where neighborhoods are saying no to rights of entry access thinking they can slow down the process. A member asked about the escalating costs of properties and how they keep the Board informed. Staff said their appraisers created a trending tool to help track costs. Some types of real estate have gone up more significantly than others. They do their best to buy property as soon as possible. Another member asked how many people work in her department. Staff said 27 Sound Transit staff and between 30 and 60 consultants. That could ramp up to 100 consultants when they get to West Seattle and Tacoma Link Extensions. A member asked if they have lawyers dedicated to their department. Staff said they have in-house and outside counsel who are real estate experts. A member asked what percentage of the real estate costs are part of total projects costs. Staff said it is about 10%. A member asked if they have a reserve for claims. Staff said they have estimates and contingencies for condemnation. They have been under budget on their real property costs. A member asked if they have a contentious group of people and whether they are responsible for negotiation and outreach. Real Property has responsibility for negotiations, and they participate with the outreach team on a regular basis. Another member asked about the housing of last resort scenario, if it has a cap, and whether that is still in place. Staff said that there is no cap in the Uniform Act. A member encouraged that staff give complete answers when dealing with property owners.

Discussion

General – A COP member said all presenters were concise and said it was one of the better meetings in a while. Another member concurred with that assessment. Another member said that the presentations were straightforward and easy to follow. A member said that it was nice for presenters to answer questions provided ahead of time.

Racial Equity Toolkit Use in Project Planning – A member said it was good to have an example of how the RET was applied. Another member said it was good to know that Sound Transit is responding to changing times and how underrepresented populations are interacted with.

Long Term Light Rail Vehicle Supply and Storage – A member asked if there will be follow up based on the timeline that was presented and said he would be interested in a follow up presentation. Another member said he had a better understanding of why they are in the position they are in with regards to light rail vehicles.

Real Property Market Tracking and Property Acquisition Process – A member commented that it was great to have the presenters know what to expect from the COP.

Questions for next presentations

The COP split into an in-person group and an online group to identify questions for the August meeting presentations.

The Chair said that the COP will divide into an online and an in the room group to develop questions for next month's presenters. The following is a compilation of the questions identified by both groups.

Operations System Expansion Support

- What does this entail since so much of operations isn't done by ST
- Are there lessons from maintenance of existing facilities that can be learned to make future facilities more maintainable?
- What problems are Operations System Expansion Support trying to solve?
 - What are their goals?
 - What do they actually do and why do they exist?

Bus Rapid Transit Program

- Would they reconsider if BRT goes to airport from the east side, if the Board decides to build BWSLE stations north and south of the International District, thus making the light rail trip from the eastside to the airport longer?
- Does Link Light Rail affect their planning for vehicles and plans for BRT?
- Any update on the Tukwila light rail station and its relationship to the planned BRT station?
- What is the general status of BRT on SR 522 and how is the property acquisition going?

East Link Starter Line

- How many cars will there be and how often will they run?
- Will the Board be making a decision on the number of cars and how often they run?

Discussion, Adoption of Previous Meeting Summary, Member Reports

The meeting summary for the June 14 meeting was approved, with one correction suggested by one member. The chair announced the Tracy Oster has stepped down and the agency will be starting a process to replace her. The chair also explained the process for chair and vice chair elections which included: accepting nominations at the August meeting, holding the election online prior to the September meeting, announcing the elected chair and vice chair at the September meeting, and transitioning to the new chair and vice chair at the October meeting.

CEO Timm is scheduled for the September meeting so members were encouraged to start thinking about questions they want to ask her.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, August 9, 2023, 5:30 – 8:15 PM

- Operations System Expansion Support
- Bus Rapid Transit Program
- East Link Starter Line