



Summary Minutes

Rider Experience and Operations Committee Meeting March 6, 2025

Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 1:02 p.m. by Committee Chair Walker and was available for viewing in person and online.

The meeting was recorded and can be found at <https://www.soundtransit.org/get-to-know-us/board-directors/meeting-videos>.

Roll call of members

| Chair | Vice Chair |
|---|---|
| (P) Kristina Walker, Tacoma Councilmember | (P) Ed Prince, Renton Council President |

| Board Members | |
|---|---|
| (P) Angela Birney, Redmond Mayor | (P) De'Sean Quinn, King County Councilmember |
| (P) Christine Frizzell, Lynnwood Mayor | (A) Peter von Reichbauer, King County Councilmember |
| (P) Hunter George, Fircrest Councilmember | (P) Girmay Zahilay, King County Council Chair |

Hunter Rancipher, Board Relations Specialist, announced that a quorum of the committee was present at roll call.

Report of the Chair

Chair Walker introduced new members of the committee: Hunter George, Fircrest Councilmember, and De'Sean Quinn, King County Councilmember.

Chair Walker also provided brief remarks regarding Link service reliability, noting that the agency's riders deserve and expect higher levels of reliability and service. She highlighted that a joint presentation from agency staff and partners from King County Metro (KCM) would be given later during the meeting and encouraged Board members to jump in and be heavily engaged in the topic as future reports are given.

CEO Report

Interim CEO Sparrman provided the CEO Report.

Link Resiliency Study Update

CEO Sparrman provided updates on the status of the Link Operational Resiliency Study. He noted the committee will receive a presentation from agency leaders and partners from King County Metro's Rail Division. He further noted that Sound Transit is currently in the process of renegotiating its Intergovernmental Agreement with King County Metro, a process which allows the agency to update its expectations and drive for further efficiencies.

Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program

CEO Sparrman reported that the agency has joined the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program, an effort designed to educate organizations and their staff on recognizing and supporting individuals with non-visible disabilities. He noted that the agency's participation in this program will help expand understanding of hidden disabilities, reduce access barriers, and support all riders who utilize the agency's system.

Public comment

Committee Chair Walker announced that public comment would be accepted via email to emailtheboard@soundtransit.org, in person, and would also be accepted virtually.

There were no written, in-person, or virtual comments given.

Closed Session

Chair Walker advised that the committee was going into closed session to discuss the agency's collective bargaining negotiations. He introduced Noah Williams, Senior Legal Counsel, who explained that the committee was allowed to enter into executive session to discuss the qualifications of applicants for public employment under RCW 42.30.140 (4)(b).

The executive session began at 1:09 p.m. and was scheduled to return at 1:24 p.m.

The executive session was extended by 5 minutes, and the meeting was scheduled to resume at 1:29 p.m.

The meeting was called back to order at 1:29 p.m.

Business Items

For Committee final action

February 6, 2025, Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting minutes

It was moved by Board member Committee Vice Chair Prince, seconded by Board member Birney, and carried by the unanimous vote of all committee members present that the minutes of the February 6, 2025, Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting be approved as presented.

For Recommendation to the Board

Motion No. M2025-12: Authorizing the chief executive officer to execute a three-year labor agreement with PROTEC17, covering Passenger Information Coordinators.

Chris Elwell, Labor and Workforce Development Executive Director, John Boufford, Labor Director, and Michelle Kovacs, Internal Labor Relations Deputy Director, provided the presentation on the action.

It was moved by Committee Vice Chair Prince, seconded by Board member Birney, and carried by the unanimous vote of all committee members present that Motion No. M2025-12 be forwarded to the Board with a do-pass recommendation.

Reports to the Committee

Operations Resiliency Study Update

Moises Gutierrez, Agency Oversight Deputy CEO, Russ Arnold, Service Delivery Deputy CEO, and Evan Inkster, KCM Rail Division Director, provided the report.

Mr. Gutierrez provided an overview of the report's structure, notifying the committee that the report will include a follow-up on operational reliability issues discussed at the December REO meeting, Link light rail's operating model, findings from the system assessment, and discussion on immediate, near, and long-term work to improve resilience, reliability, safety, and passenger information.

Mr. Arnold highlighted the difference between reliability and resiliency in the context of agency conversations on the topic. He noted that reliability means the quantifiable metrics and qualitative user experience measured for the Link system, which while impacted by system resiliency, also contains additional factors. He further noted that resiliency means the ability of the Link system to withstand pressures from different sources, such as weather, passenger loads, new additions to service, and other unforeseen stresses.

Mr. Arnold provided additional information on recent Link reliability challenges. He reported that system reliability has decreased with the addition of new extensions, with one in 14 trips not running as scheduled in November 2024, a decrease from the rate of one in 30 trips not running as scheduled in March of the same year. He noted that gap trains are deployed to help assist when these issues arise, but that doing so creates an unstable and unpredictable rider experience as trains bunch up when new trains are added to the alignment.

Mr. Arnold then gave an update on the Link operating resiliency work timeline, noting the recent completion of the operating systems assessment, and current underway power and light rail vehicle improvements. He also provided information on a network resiliency redesign effort that is in progress, which will update communications infrastructure throughout the system.

Mr. Arnold detailed the current operating model for Sound Transit's Link system. Sound Transit owns the system, provides its funding mechanism, and is responsible for security, fare ambassadors, wayfinding, signage, passenger information, marketing, and service characteristics. King County Metro's Rail Division operates the system, managing operators, control center, and maintenance personnel to maintain the fleet of over 200 light rail vehicles. Mr. Arnold noted that the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) that outlines the relationship between Sound Transit and King County Metro is renegotiated every few years, and that one of those renegotiation cycles is currently underway. He also explained the rationale behind the operating model, noting that Sound Transit adopted this model early on to allow the agency to focus on capital expansion while leveraging the experience and well-established operating knowledge from King County Metro. It was also noted that this was also a matter of convenience, as both Sound Transit and King County Metro shared operations in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel, as well as the agency's Link operations being fully within King County prior to the opening of the Lynnwood Link Extension.

Mr. Arnold reviewed the physical infrastructure system for the Link system, noting how power moves from the power grid to Traction Power Substations (TPSS), continuing to the Overhead Catenary System (OCS), then through the trains to provide power, returning to the TPSS through a return current system in the rails.

Mr. Inkster provided information on recent improvements that have been made since the last report to the committee in December. He noted that new policies and procedures have been adopted, which allow for power crews and other maintenance staff to respond quicker to power loss incidents along the alignment. Mr. Inkster also highlighted the various improvements to the TPSS, including the standardization of requirements for system safety and efficiency, completion of track cleaning in the DSTT to enhance electrical isolation, as well as the inspection and completion of repair backlogs for the OCS.

Mr. Gutierrez provided an overview of other recent improvements. These include organizational changes to asset management to reduce confusion and improve decision-making, new training for Link operators of how to clear brake fault issues and new software updates to enhance brake system valve leak detection, and improvements to passenger support through enhancements to rider alerts, better communication of alternate travel options during disruptions and integration of security into passenger experience.

Mr. Gutierrez highlighted recent improvements in disruption times, noting that in 2024, there was an average of 32.4 hours of disruption per month, or 5.3 percent of operating hours, whereas the last four months saw an average of 15.4 hours of disruption per month, or 2.5 percent of operating hours. He noted that while the number of service hours disrupted has decreased in the last few months, the number of disruptions has increased, from an average of 15.8 per month in 2024 to 24.8 per month in the last four months. Mr. Gutierrez elaborated that while serious disruptions that impact service for significant periods have decreased, there has been an increase in the number of disruptions caused by individual light rail vehicles. He noted a caveat that the increase may also be partially contributed to due to an increase in the level of reporting on disruptions through the rider alert system, which now tracks smaller issues than before.

Mr. Gutierrez provided detail on the results of the Operating System Resiliency Assessment. He noted that the recommendations of the report are broken down into six categories: Asset management, standards and procedures, operational networks, long-range planning, projects in construction (rail activation), and operating partnership and organizational changes.

Mr. Gutierrez then provided additional detail on the categories, including the desired outcome, number of recommendations, and an example of working being undertaken within the category. For asset management, 27 recommendations were given. The desired outcome is maintaining the agency's state of good repair program, with an example being to expand the capabilities within the asset management system. Under standards and procedures, 18 recommendations were given. The desired outcome is codifying the lessons to help the agency better design and maintain the Link system, with an example being to perform a system wide traction power study. For operational networks, six recommendations were given. The desired outcome is a strong, resilient backbone connecting all operating systems, with an example being to upgrade the system's network configuration from tier two to tier three. A long-range planning, 12 recommendations were given. The desired outcome is adaptations and retrofits to make operations more flexible and service more reliable for passengers, with an example being identifying track configuration improvements. For projects in constructions (rail activation), five recommendations were given. The desired outcome is for lessons learned to inform what the agency builds next, with an example being testing new extensions under degraded conditions. Under operating partnership and organizational changes, 10 recommendations were given. The desired outcome is for the agency and its partnerships to be structured to maximize operating effectiveness, with an example being clearly defining roles and decision-making processes.

Mr. Gutierrez provided additional detail on future work phases and timelines for the implementation of actions on system resiliency. The timeline outlined four categories: systems assessment, immediate actions, network resiliency, and near and long-term solution implementation. He highlighted specific points from each category and noted that 80 percent of initial work items identified have been completed, and that work is ongoing to address additional recommendations. He further noted that staff will continue to work aggressively to implement recommendations from the report while developing completion schedules, and that additional reports will be given to the committee on a quarterly basis as work progresses.

Board member Birney noted her perception of staff's high level of intensity in their work on this topic and expressed her concern of whether this is sustainable. Mr. Gutierrez agreed that there is a high level of intensity on this topic, and that he is working with CEO Sparrman to help institutionalize this into the way the agency does business. He noted that efforts are ongoing to assess staff needs to ensure that this work can remain a top priority going forward. Mr. Arnold added that staff is working to ensure that this work is prioritized, and that areas of responsibility and decision-making are well defined, to help best utilize agency resources and talent to the best of their abilities. CEO Sparrman also added that the agency is changing, and that recent issues that have been faced are emblematic of the agency's shift from purely capital expansion programs to a maturing operations program as well.

Board member Birney noted that some of issues noted in the systems assessment are the same as what she is addressing in her jurisdiction, albeit at an accelerated pace at the agency, and raised the issue of whether the current operating model is the best fit for the agency going forward. Mr. Gutierrez responded that this is a point that staff will keep their eye on. CEO Sparrman added that staff will bring back updates to the committee on the renegotiation of the agency's IGA with King County Metro, and that the renegotiated agreement could be a steppingstone if the Board of Directors chooses to look at changes or other alternatives to the operating model in the future.

Board member Quinn asked whether future updates to the committee on this topic will be as comprehensive as this report. Mr. Arnold responded that the committee should not expect to see future updates to be as holistically comprehensive, but at a similar level of detail on a particular topic. He also noted that the committee can direct further detail to staff at their discretion. CEO Sparrman added that staff is always happy to have additional briefings with Board members if they feel they need any further information not covered during committee meetings.

Chair Walker asked what stage the IGA will be at after the transition to a new CEO and what steps are being taken to ensure a smooth handoff. CEO Sparrman responded that the IGA already has a draft version complete, and that the goal is to have the agreement finalized and ready for a second presentation to the committee in April.

Chair Walker asked for clarification on what it means to upgrade the agency's network configuration from tier two to tier three. Mr. Arnold responded that the tiers are representative of the level of redundancy built into the network system. A tier two network is a mesh system that has some levels of redundancy, whereas the tier three network has an additional fiber backbone that can provide additional level of redundancy. He provided an analogy of a tier two network being a single outlet with multiple plugs being used, with a tier three network being like having fewer items plugged into multiple outlets to reduce load on the system.

Chair Walker further asked what cost impacts there would be as part of the upgrade. Mr. Gutierrez responded that the agency has partnered with a consulting firm to undertake a network assessment, and that this can be an area of focus in their next update to the committee. Mr. Arnold added that there will most likely be a monetary cost if additional infrastructure improvements are found to be needed. CEO Sparrman added that this item, as well as most others included in the presentation, will drive towards higher costs for the agency. He further noted that staff is currently looking at the money allocated to the state of good repair program, as well as the impacts on the long-range financial plan, and committed to transparency with the Board of Directors in what the cost impacts will be.

Fare Ambassador Update

Marie Olson, Passenger Experience Executive Director, and Tanya Starke, Acting Passenger Success Deputy Director, provided the report.

Ms. Starke provided an update on the fare resolutions program, describing the numbers and rate of violations within the program. She provided further information on the number of interactions resolved at each step, with 47 interactions completed at the 3rd interaction and 11 at the 4th interaction.

Ms. Starke also provided information on assaults against fare ambassadors, noting that all categories of assault – physical, verbal, and non-contact physical aggression – are trending lower. She further noted that the Security Operations Center created specific call types in October 2023 to better track assaults against transit workers, leading to better data over the last year.

Ms. Olson noted that assault data was included in the presentation to highlight the importance of worker safety, noting the improvements that have been realized recently due to increased communication and coordination between the fare ambassadors and security personnel. Ms. Starke added that the fare ambassadors recently had a familiarization training with the Field Activity Specialist Team, which has led to a better understanding of each group's role and enhanced relationships between the teams.

Board member Birney highlighted the data presentation on the number of assaults and asked if the data could be presented in further context, such as the rate of assaults per number of service hours or trips. Ms. Starke agreed that additional context can be provided.

Board member Birney further asked what steps were being taken to promote a more proactive approach to ensure employee safety. Ms. Starke responded that whenever an incident occurs, an investigation is undertaken to see what improvements and lessons learned can be applied. She further noted that the transition of staff off of vehicles and onto station platforms has helped increase the feeling of safety among staff, as well as resulting in a lower rate of incidents.

Board member George requested that future presentations on assault data be put into a seasonal context, drawing on his professional experience at Tacoma Parks where he noted that there is usually an increase in incidents when service utilization is increased.

Passenger Impact Program

Pamela Wrenn, Link Right-of-Way Access Senior Program Manager, provided the report.

Ms. Wrenn noted that the installation of roofing at Pinehurst was delayed due to weather impacts, with the new end date of the work being May 9th.

Ms. Wrenn noted that work on 2-Line integration and testing to the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel has been postponed due to a previously reported fiber issue, and that the new dates for completion of this work are still being determined.

Ms. Wrenn discussed resiliency work done on February 23, 2025, which allowed for the completion of multiple projects in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel, enhancing system reliability and ensuring the best return on investment for the disruption.

Ms. Wrenn described work on Pinehurst station to be completed during Q2 of 2025. She noted that the stairwells for the station will be installed, resulting in similar impacts to the Pinehurst station roofing work. The impact would be from March 24, 2025 – April 13, 2025, as well as from April 24, 2025 – May 30, 2025. Single tracking would occur around the station on weekdays between 5:30 p.m. and the end of revenue service, with 12 minute headways systemwide.

Ms. Wrenn provided information on rail replacement work near International District station in Q2 2025. She noted that the downtown tunnel will have single tracking on the northbound side from April 14, 2025 – April 23, 2025, with downtown headways being estimated at 25 – 30 minutes. She noted that work is still ongoing to support passengers and mitigate impacts as much as possible.

Board member Frizzell expressed her concerns that the information provided via the Passenger Impact Program isn't effectively communicated to the public. Mr. Arnold shared his view that it is time for the agency to undertake another outreach campaign to encourage members of the public to sign up for rider alerts to be better informed.

Board member Birney shared her thoughts on disruptions and expressed her appreciation for staff engagement that allows for passengers to be best supported during difficult service outages.

Chair Walker requested that if a sign-up campaign for rider alerts goes out, that it be shared with committee members so that it can be further shared through their channels.

REO Metrics

Raj Cheriell, Essential Data and Analytics Director, provided the report, giving an overview of 2024 metrics data.

Mr. Cheriell highlighted ridership data for 2024, showcasing that ridership patterns were similar to projections, with a rise in the late summer followed by a decrease in ridership in the late fall.

Mr. Cheriell provided information on Link crowding, highlighting the increase in crowding between July 2024 and October 2024. He specifically noted that trains are becoming crowded for longer periods of time between more stations.

Mr. Cheriell outlined trip delivery and on-time performance statistics by mode. He noted that the partial trip percentage for Link had increased by the end of 2024, which coincided with many service disruptions. He also noted that Link on-time performance had decreased to 63.7 percent by December 2024, down from 82 percent in November.

Mr. Cheriell described ST Express trip delivery metrics, with Community Transit having an improvement throughout the year due to increase operators and mechanic labor availability, King County Metro's struggles with operator and maintenance availability at its East Base resulting in decreased performance from June to October of 2024, and Pierce Transit's improvement throughout the year due to decreased trip count during the spring 2024 service change and increased operator availability. He noted that on-time performance stayed relatively consistent, with Community Transit being the highest performing, followed by King County Metro and Pierce Transit

Mr. Cheriell provided information on Sounder trip metrics, highlighting that Sounder has met its target of 95 percent on-time trip delivery all but three months of 2024.

Mr. Cheriell gave information on T Line fleet availability, noting that there was a decrease in fleet availability into the mid-80 percent range from March to June, 2024, due to the small fleet size and one vehicle being out of service with mechanical issues. He also provided information on T Line station utilization, with the most popular station being the two terminals as well as Union Station, Theater District, and Stadium District, which all house local high schools and university campuses.

Mr. Cheriell reported out on improvements to vertical transportation reliability and up time, with metrics across the board improving throughout 2024. He specifically noted that the two primary categories that the agency has control over – mechanical repair and scheduled maintenance – are responsible for only about two percent of all outages for the year.

Mr. Cheriell also provided information on parking utilization, highlighting that stations that have been open for longer experience the highest rates of utilization, though it is expected that all newer stations will begin to see increased utilization in response to higher ridership.

Board member George asked how much traffic impacts Pierce Transit's on-time performance. Mr. Cheriell responded that research into Pierce Transit's on-time performance notes that about 70 percent is due to operator availability, with the remaining 30 percent attributable to traffic conditions. He further noted that while Sound Transit does try to take traffic into account when planning service and performance metrics, that the South corridor is the most heavily crowded.

Executive session – None.

Other business – None.

Next meeting

Thursday, April 3, 2024
1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
Ruth Fisher Boardroom and Virtually via Zoom.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:59 p.m.

ATTEST:

Kristina Walker
Rider Experience and Operations Committee Chair

Kathryn Flores
Board Administrator

APPROVED on _____, HRR.