

**SOUND TRANSIT
TRANSIT OPERATIONS TASK FORCE
Meeting Summary
May 22, 2008**

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 11:04 a.m. by Chair Dow Constantine in the Ruth Fisher Boardroom, 401 South Jackson Street, Seattle, Washington.

Roll Call

Chair

(P) Dow Constantine, King County Council Vice Chair

(A) Fred Butler, Issaquah Deputy Council President

(P) Deanna Dawson, Edmonds Councilmember

(P) Dave Enslow, Sumner Mayor

(P) John Marchione, Redmond Mayor

(A) Julia Patterson, King County Council Chair

Report of the Chair

Chair Constantine announced that he and Boardmember Enslow were present at roll call and that other members would be present shortly. He announced that the first meeting of the task force was held on April 24, 2008 and that the meeting schedule was laid out at that meeting.

Follow-up Items: Fare Policy

Agnes Govern, Executive Director gave an update to the Task Force based on questions from Boardmember Enslow on fare policy for Tacoma Link. She noted that the topic of Tacoma Link Fares will not be considered by the task force but the topic would be brought to the Board.

Maintenance Base Capacity Presentation

Chair Constantine announced that Boardmember Dawson had arrived and asked Ms. Govern to give the presentation on maintenance base capacity. Ms. Govern noted that Bonnie Todd, Transportation Services Director would normally lead the presentations but was out of town. Ms. Govern indicated that much of what will be explored with the Task Force is moving Sound Transit from a Sound Move perspective of a prescribed set of services and projects to a transit agency with an ongoing need to plan services to support growing demand. She explained that the focus for the first few months is on operations business models and costs and described the changes that are being looked at for each line of service. She said that information would be presented over the next few months leading up to asking for direction in August on how Sound Transit should operate, or procure the services of others to operate, the agency's transit services.

Ms. Govern announced that this meeting would focus on base capacity since that is a critical element in any decision on business models. For both Tacoma and Central Link

light rail, there is sufficient maintenance base capacity through 2020. For Sounder service, Ms. Govern explained that the agency is looking at operations, maintenance, layover facilities and fueling. Sound Transit currently contracts with BNSF for operations and use of the train tracks, and with Amtrak for maintenance and layover locations. She explained that the quick launch of the Sounder program required using Amtrak for maintenance and for using the Holgate base as the layover facility. The contract with Amtrak included improvements that Amtrak would make to the Holgate base that have only been partially completed; the current contract with Amtrak expires in 2009 but will automatically continue unless a two year notice is given to end the contract.

Chair Constantine asked questions about the time period of the contract and the improvements to the Holgate base. Ms. Govern clarified that the contract began in 1999 and Martin Young, Sounder Program Manager explained that the facility improvements were not specifically defined in the contract; but that a maintenance facility structure was included. Boardmember Enslow asked if the agency should look into getting money back for not receiving those services. Mr. Young confirmed that it was something the agency could explore. Ms. Govern added that a consultant, Raul Bravo and Associates, started work last year to look at costs and that a letter has been sent to Amtrak regarding renegotiating aspects of the contract.

Ms. Govern reported that Sounder's ridership has increased and is expected to further increase once the extension to Lakewood is completed and because higher gas prices may cause a greater demand for transit.

Ms. Govern showed a chart illustrating cost per vehicle mile for 2001-2007 that showed costs going down as service is added, although the overall cost is still higher than peer agencies. David Huffaker, Transportation Finance Planner clarified that the term 'vehicle' used in the chart referred to one train car, not the entire train.

Ms. Govern also pointed out that ST vehicle maintenance costs are above averages and that contract terms allow those costs to be lowered as service is added; but even the lowered costs will be above the peer range in 2008. She reported that the consultant looking at the service contract has noted the higher costs and concluded that competitive procurement is a path to lowering costs. She noted that in order to go out for a competitive bid, Sound Transit would need to have a maintenance base.

Chair Constantine asked whether lack of competition at the time the contract was procured and the assumption that physical improvements would be made to the facilities factored into the higher costs; staff confirmed that improvement costs are part of the contract and that future presentations will break out the costs involved and will compare the costs with peers' costs. He asked whether Sound Transit's average of 1/3 of the costs going to maintenance was consistent with other agencies. Mr. Huffaker noted that the next presentation will break out these costs and compare costs with peers; normally maintenance costs vary from 10-40% of the costs.

Boardmember Marchione asked whether Amtrak does maintenance for any peer agencies. Mr. Huffaker responded that some peer agreements with Amtrak do include maintenance and that the study being done by Raul Bravo and Associates will show the contract terms that some of the peers have with Amtrak.

Ms. Govern noted that a contract amendment with Raul Bravo was executed so that the consultant could do further work on a Sounder vehicle maintenance strategy. The consultant is currently analyzing the cost of a base to operate and maintain a Sounder fleet and will include ROW acquisition; the savings will probably not fully cover these costs. However, she noted that one of the benefits of having a base is the ability to perform heavy maintenance in the future.

Chair Constantine asked how much of a savings Sound Transit could expect if a maintenance base was built; Ms. Govern said the consultant has given an initial estimate of more than 10%. Mr. Young explained that the current plan calls for preventative maintenance at a central facility, and layover facilities at each end that may include maintenance facilities in the future.

Boardmember Dawson asked if negotiations over maintenance services for the Sounder Trains would affect use of the Amtrak trains under the rail plus program in the North corridor. Ms. Govern responded that the maintenance services and use of the trains are separate things and that the rail plus program is beneficial to all parties.

Ms. Govern summarized the commuter rail portion by saying that while costs are trending in the right direction they are still higher than Sound Transit's peers and the region does not have adequate maintenance facilities for heavy rail (needed by Amtrak, WSDOT Intercity Rail, and Sounder). Sound Transit is looking at a number of options including partnering with Amtrak and WSDOT in a joint facility as well as a stand alone base for Sounder at various locations. Ms. Govern indicated that staff will be reporting back on this issue later this summer.

Ms. Govern then explained the ST Express bus service structure. She indicated that the existing maintenance base capacity will not be adequate in the long term for all three partners providing Sound Transit bus service. More buses were needed than were assumed in Sound Move because of the increased demand for peak-hour trips. Recent studies also show demand outpacing capacity which will require further bus purchases.

Ms. Govern shared service numbers including a chart showing a decline in deadheading, the period of time when a bus is running without offering passenger service. She also showed Sound Transit's rating versus peer agencies; the agency is making progress towards maximizing effectiveness.

Ms. Govern showed a chart identifying base capacity and expected fleet growth for the three partners. A deficit is expected at the King County Metro maintenance base by 2013-2015. King County Metro has asked Sound Transit to participate in planning and funding additions to maintenance capacity. Community Transit is currently over capacity so Sound Transit has started a competitive procurement for route 532 to serve South Everett.

Pierce Transit has enough base capacity through 2015; Sound Transit is contributing \$4.7 million to a base capacity project to allow greater efficiency; previous direction from Sound Transit's Finance Committee was to structure any investments in other agencies' bases so that the Board could make a different decision later without losing the total investment.

Ms. Govern clarified that capacity issues would come up even if no Sound Transit system expansion was planned; she also noted that Sound Transit couldn't look at competitive services without a maintenance base. She explained that the ST2 plan addresses base capacity needs; under that plan a new base would be available by 2015 that would meet projected demand until the end of the ST2 time period.

Ms. Govern summarized by saying that the region needs additional base capacity and that Sound Transit can either increase capacity through investing in partners' projects or in Sound Transit's own base capacity. She clarified that the problem exists regardless of whether Sound Transit continues service with existing partners and regardless of the outcome of a vote on ST2. She told the Task Force that if nothing is done, ST will need to pay partners to accommodate Sound Transit's bus capacity needs.

Chair Constantine asked if it was necessary to build a base to get competitive maintenance service and if it would be possible to have a competitive bid and ask the other agencies to tell us what it would cost. Ms. Govern responded that the Federal Transit Administration would need to be involved to make sure regulations were being followed. She said the option could be evaluated and brought back to the Task Force in August.

Boardmember Marchione asked if operations contracts could be bid before the bus maintenance base is built so that it could be built to specifications; Ms. Govern confirmed this could be done.

Chair Constantine stated that the Task Force will be taking up the topic of light rail and commuter rail at the next meeting.

Next Meeting:

Thursday, June 26, 2008, 11:00 a.m. to 12:45 p.m., Ruth Fisher Boardroom, 401 South Jackson Street, Seattle WA.

Adjourn

There was no other business; the meeting was adjourned at 12:05 p.m.



Dow Constantine
Transit Operations Task Force Chair

ATTEST:



Katie Weiss
Board Coordinator