



## Summary Minutes

### Rider Experience and Operations Committee Meeting October 5, 2023

#### Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 1:01 p.m. by 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/livestream-video>.

#### Roll call of members

Chair	Vice Chair
(P) Kristina Walker, Tacoma Deputy Mayor	(P) Ed Prince, Renton Councilmember

Board Members	
(P) David Baker, Kenmore Councilmember	(P) Kim Roscoe, Fife Mayor
(A) Christine Frizzell, Lynnwood Mayor	(P) Dave Upthegrove, King County Council Chair
(P) Debora Juarez, Seattle Council President	(A) Peter von Reichbauer, King County Councilmember

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

#### Report of the Chair

##### Monthly Contract Reports

The monthly contract reports were included in members' packets for review.

#### CEO Report

CEO Julie Timm provided the CEO Report.

##### Open house for potential changes to Link fares and parking options

An online open house was launched to inform the public about, and sought input, on potential changes to Link light rail fares and parking options and would run through October 22, 2023. CEO Timm encouraged the public to complete a survey regarding fare and parking fee options to be considered by the Board in the coming months. There were also online sessions and focus groups, as well as street teams distributing information. Staff requested Board Members and agency partners to communicate this information in their communities. Within the next several years, Sound Transit service would extend into areas that did not have current have Light Rail service, and those communities could be impacted by any fare and parking fee changes. Public engagement for proposed fare changes was required per FTA regulations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

##### Changes to Station Naming – Symphony Station

The agency continued to receive comments and requests to update Link Station Names. CEO Timm

reminded the Committee that the University Street Station was being renamed to Symphony Station. This change was made in response to research confirming customer confusion between University Street, University of Washington and U District Stations, and which of these stations serve the University of Washington campus area.

The renaming process took into account naming lessons learned, public engagement, and aligned with the updated Station Line and Facility Naming policy adopted by the Board in 2021. Symphony Station was a landmark-based name, was most favored during public outreach, and prioritized wayfinding and best practices. The Board adopted this renaming in Q4 2021. It was planned to occur with the Lynnwood Link Extension opening, which would provide cost efficiency by implementing this change with other updates required to support system expansion.

#### Redmond Technology Station Garage Opening

CEO Timm announced the opening day for the Redmond Technology Station garage would be October 30, 2023. This opening would be earlier than the station and East Link Extension to allow for maximum use of the facility. The team was actively working to prepare for the opening, from finalizing maintenance maps with the City of Redmond to staff training and temporary signage.

#### Upcoming Passenger Impacts and Improvements

CEO Timm acknowledged the colder weather meant more people would shelter in stations and on trains. Unsheltered passengers had rights to ride the trains and noted sleeping on trains was not against agency code of conduct. Agency fare ambassadors and security contractors would be present and may execute wellness checks and would appropriately handle situations if passengers reacted negatively.

Separately, between October 9 and October 26, 2023, there would be installation of digital signage at the original five T Line stations between Tacoma Dome and Theater District stations in preparation for the Passenger Information Management System launching on the T Line in Spring 2024. This work would take two days per station and take place during revenue service hours and passengers may have to walk around ladders as crews work on signs.

### **Public comment**

Chair Walker announced that public comment would be accepted via email to [emailtheboard@soundtransit.org](mailto:emailtheboard@soundtransit.org), in person, and would also be accepted virtually.

The following people provided written comments:

Jack Whisner  
Stephen Fesler

There were no in- in person or virtual comments submitted.

### **Business Items**

#### **For Committee final action**

September 7, 2023, Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting minutes

**It was moved by Committee Vice Chair Prince, seconded by Boardmember Roscoe and carried by unanimous consent that the minutes of the September 7, 2023, Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting be approved as presented.**

#### **For Recommendation to the Board**

Motion No. M2023-84: Approving the East Link Starter Line Service and Fare Equity report.

Brian de Place, Director of System and Service Planning, provided the staff presentation for this item and the following, Resolution No. R2023-31.

Boardmember Roscoe asked for more context and clarification on public feedback regarding rider experience and the ST Express revamp. Mr. de Place replied that the public outreach proposed to restructure the I-5 North bus service and orient and truncate at Lynnwood. The feedback showed some concern with that proposal.

Chair Walker asked if staffing support was available for Phase 1 of the Service Plan. Mr. de Place confirmed that was correct, the agency had staffing support for Phase 1, which was for Light Rail.

**Motion No. M2023-84 was moved by Boardmember Roscoe and seconded by Committee Vice Chair Prince.**

Chair Walker called for a voice vote.

**It was carried by unanimous consent of all committee members present that Motion No. M2023-84 be forwarded to the Board with a do-pass recommendation.**

Resolution No. R2023-31: Adopting the first phase of the 2024 Service Plan, which includes major service changes of opening 2 Line service between Redmond Technology and South Bellevue Stations, extending 1 Line service to Lynnwood and restoring two daily round trips on Sounder N Line.

**Resolution No. R2023-31 was moved by Boardmember Roscoe and seconded by Committee Vice Chair Prince.**

Chair Walker called for a voice vote.

**It was carried by unanimous consent of all committee members present that Resolution No. R2023-31 be forwarded to the Board with a do-pass recommendation.**

Motion No. M2023-85: Approving Sound Transit's submittal of Revision 1 of the 2023 Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan to the Washington State Department of Transportation's State Safety Oversight Office.

Melissa Durel, Manager of Security and Safety Management System, provided the presentation.

**Motion No. M2023-85 was moved by Committee Vice Chair Prince and seconded by Boardmember Roscoe.**

Chair Walker called for a voice vote.

**It was carried by unanimous consent of all committee members present that Motion No. M2023-85 be forwarded to the Board with a do-pass recommendation.**

Motion No. M2023-86: Changing the name of the Bel-Red/130th Station to BelRed Station and the Spring District/120th Station to Spring District Station within the East Link Extension.

Candace Toth, Manager of Wayfinding and Signage, provided the staff presentation.

**Motion No. M2023-86 was moved by Committee Vice Chair Prince and seconded by Boardmember Roscoe.**

Chair Walker called for a voice vote.

**It was carried by unanimous consent of all committee members present that Motion No. M2023-86 be forwarded to the Board with a do-pass recommendation.**

## **Reports to the Committee**

REO Metrics Presentation – Operations and Safety

Russ Arnold, Deputy CEO Chief Service Delivery Officer, provided the presentation. Link achieved higher ridership in July 2023 than in any prior month of its existence, largely resulted from a confluence of major events around Seattle, including All-Star weekend, Taylor Swift concerts, the Bite of Seattle and the Capitol Hill Block Party, among others. Prior to All-Star week, the highest single ridership day on Link light rail was on September 30, 2016, with 101,000 riders. Link ridership temporarily set a new single day record with 115,600 boardings for the July 11, 2023, All Star Game. That record was broken each of the two days of the Taylor Swift concerts on July 22 and 23, 2023, with ridership reaching an all-time high of 136,800.

Sustaining that level of ridership could cause crowding to begin negatively impacting the passenger experience without changes to the service patterns or service levels. Staff believed that confluence of events may have created an anomaly in ridership numbers that would not repeat in the coming months. Staff would continue to monitor the impacts new ridership highs would have on passenger loads and would adjust service accordingly.

ST Express ridership also saw impacts from the July 2023 events, but those impacts were lesser than that experienced with Link. ST Express experienced its highest ridership since the start of the pandemic, and saw, for the first time, ridership crawl above half of what it was pre-pandemic. Mr. Arnold noted the report was filtered to show ridership by corridor. The three routes along SR 520 made it the corridor with the highest number of boardings.

Industry standard transit performance metrics were shared in the report. For Link, both agency light rail vehicle fleets were under target for their vehicle availability. For the Kinkisharyo fleet, this was a function of the movement of a number of Kinkisharyo vehicles to Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF) East for major overhauls. While Siemens fleet was below target, the trend showed performance improving. The biggest driver of Siemens vehicle availability continued to be the brake sensors, not the brakes themselves. Siemens, and its vendor, continued to troubleshoot the issue and the agency continued to wait for those results.

Despite fleet availability being below target, the mean distance between failures remained well above standard for both fleets, which could be a function of the high level of preventative maintenance compliance. Tasks related to track and power fell slightly below target. Part of the track performance issue was related to the decision to changing the way the agency monitored compliance by treating each track as an individual PM rather than segments of track. While compliance for facilities mechanical tasks was 59 percent, less than 1 percent of all tasks weren't completed, the remaining 40 percent were not completed by the assigned calendar date. Staff was working with King County Metro to determine whether this was an administrative reporting issue or a labor issue. Based on these discussions, the two agencies would develop a recovery plan. Mr. Arnold noted that despite the record ridership, customer complaints about Link service were among the lowest they had been in the last year and a half, and when normalized by ridership, the lowest they had been in the last two and half years.

For ST Express, a large portion of the customer complaints were related to trips not being available to customers when expected – whether late or missed entirely. These complaints aligned with actual performance, which showed that each of the agency's three partners struggled to meet the target of delivering 99.8 percent of the scheduled trips. Many of the missed trips were due to operator shortages, but a significant portion was due to the the function of high rates of vehicle failure. Staff believed those vehicle failures could be attributed to parts shortages, and at least in part to a shortage of mechanics at the partner agencies. All of the agency's partners were working aggressively to hire drivers at a faster rate and working to find ways to retain personnel. ST Express staff conducted weekly meetings with these partners to keep apprised of recruitment progress.

Sounder had a positive record of on time performance. However, the mode was experiencing slight hardships with operating all of the scheduled trips. Sounder remained below the target of 99.5 percent for the second month in a row. Mr. Arnold noted that for a month with 528 scheduled trips, missing only

3 trips would bring it below target. Customer complaints about Sounder increased considerably in July 2023. A significant portion of those complaints were related to crowding on the South line. A few of the complaints referenced the impacts bicycles and e-scooter parking was having on seating availability.

Since the beginning of 2023, misuse was the leading cause of outages for vertical conveyances, by a considerable margin. This was often not deliberate misuse, but instead customers utilizing the elevators and escalators in ways they weren't able to support, such as bringing heavy luggage on escalators. Staff used the data to identify stations and units of concern during a bi-weekly mitigation plan meeting. After assets or stations with the most incidents were identified, staff communicated that to security leads in monthly meetings with security staff with the hopes having personnel be more alert to these incidents at those locations. Given the random nature of these events, it proved difficult to measure the effectiveness of this effort.

David Wright, Chief Safety Officer, provided the Safety and Security data report. Mr. Wright reminded the committee that the agency moved from one contract to four contracts earlier this year and would share the improvements since that took place.

There were six call types as an indicator of security environment: assault, biohazard, graffiti/vandalism, medical, trespass, and unlawful transit conduct. Assault could be either verbal or physical. Biohazard was an unsanitary act on transit. Graffiti/vandalism such as tagging, destroying property. Medical such as with safety and wellness checks, which could result in additional medical assistance calls. Trespass was someone accessing a restricted area. Unlawful transit conduct which was a widespread category that could include loud music, drinking, smoking, or other acts.

Unlawful transit increased in May 2023 due to the onboarding of the additional security contractors. The additional contractors allowed for wider range of coverage to document more unlawful transit activity. Top stations for security incidents had historically been Tukwila, Westlake, and Northgate stations. Brad Blackburn, Deputy Director of Public Safety, briefed on the improvements made at the Tukwila station this year. The Tukwila station had King County Metro as its bus route and showed high ridership and security was increased by 30 percent at that station. The prior vendor was able to provide one officer whereas now there were two or three present. Additional steps towards improvement included partnering with Tukwila Police Department, a new fencing program to stop trespassers, increased lighting in the area, camera installations, and reducing vegetation in the area for clearer visibility. Majority of incidents occurred at stations rather than onboard a train. With over 2,500 trackable incidents, approximately 80 were onboard trains.

The definition of assault on a transit worker that was recently introduced by the FTA was a circumstance in which an individual knowingly, without lawful authority or permission, and with intent to endanger the safety of any individual, or with reckless disregard for the safety of human life, interferes with, disables, or incapacitates a transit worker while the transit worker was performing the duties of the transit worker – this included verbal and non-verbal acts. As an example, if someone was yelled at, it was an assault. If someone threw a soda can at an operator, striking the window, it was captured as an assault. Assaults were at about a 2 to 1 occurrence on trains versus at stations. The assaults data was categorized by six sections, assault (such as physical with foot, hand shoulder bump, etc), assault-weapon (such as knife, rock, stick), assault-weapon-worker, assault-worker (such as verbal or non-verbal threat), non-physical assault-weapon-worker, and non-physical assault-worker. Assaults with weapons had a small number of incidents comparatively.

Deployment strategies were matched with the higher risk station locations, such as Northgate, Westlake, and Tukwila stations. Only 5 percent of security incidents were assaults. The overall security strategy was to focus on the top 10 locations. Nine of the top 10 locations received a permanent increase in security officers. Eight of the 10 were regular emphasis locations for Sound Transit Police. Nine of top 10 locations received a substantial increase in mobile patrols. Onboard security had increase by 211

percent and response time to incidents decreased by 54 percent which was 10 minutes and 30 seconds to 5 minutes and 1 second.

Mr. Wright provided a contract security comparison of 2022 to 2023 of average weekly staffing before and after the new security vendors. The new vendors were full transitioned/in place as of May 2023 and the data was based on the average staffing levels for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Onboard security increased by an average of 18 to 55 personnel, platform/facility increased by an average of 97 to 153 personnel, and mobile security increased by an average of 5 to 15 personnel.

A risk mitigation strategy that was being implemented was requiring all Sound Transit staff to take a human and sex trafficking awareness training course. Washington was ranked 13th in human and sex trafficking. 70 percent of all human sex trafficking was on bus and rail. The training program was in conjunction with Homeland Security, Pierce Transit, Community Transit, and King County Metro.

Chair Walker appreciated the definition of assault and it provided a clear understanding of the reasoning behind the increase in assaults. Chair Walker referenced a slide that mentioned an increase in reporting and asked if that was correlated to having an increase in staffing. Mr. Wright confirmed that was correct.

Chair Walker asked about the August 2023 data in that there was increase in the unlawful and biohazard categories and asked if staff knew the cause of that increase. Mr. Blackburn replied that ridership increased as well as security presence which would equate in more visibility of these acts. Chair Walker asked if higher data points correlated to the ridership levels at certain stations. Mr. Blackburn confirmed that was correct and also included end of the line stations such as Northgate. Chair Walker asked if these data points included Tacoma Link or solely the 1 Line. Mr. Blackburn replied Tacoma Link was also being tracked but this report was focused on the 1 Line. Chair Walker requested the Tacoma Link data points. Mr. Blackburn committed to providing that information. CEO Timm added this report format was newly introduced to the committee and would slowly grow to add more metrics and station information.

Boardmember Roscoe asked what the training included and if it addressed matters of false accusations; she was primarily referring a recent news article of an incident that occurred in an airport where a man was inaccurately accused of trafficking. Mr. Blackburn explained the process included basic certified training that would identify actions and movements, then security would follow-up on the report with necessary higher contacts as appropriate. Boardmember Roscoe responded it seemed like responses were vetted after a report then followed up with calls to law enforcement. Mr. Blackburn confirmed that was accurate but added every report received a follow-up with the sheriff's office. Mr. Wright added that the agency does not have access into trainings given through airlines.

Chair Walker showed interest in the training and asked CEO Timm if the training was available to all Board members. CEO Timm confirmed it was.

#### Passenger Impact Portfolio Plan (Future Ready Work)

Pamela Wrenn, Deputy Project Director of Service Delivery, provided the report. The Othello and Rainier Beach Station platform rehab was executed as planned despite the short weather delay and was opened to passengers two days early. Actual headways experienced were slightly longer than predicted, at 15 minutes versus 12 minutes. Multiple projects shared the closure.

The continued work for switch machine repairs was planned for Q4 2023, for 3 Monday evenings. Night-time single tracking starting at 10 p.m. or 11 p.m. depending on location. Platform closures would occur at Beacon Hill, Mt. Baker, Columbia City, Othello, and Rainier Beach stations with 25-minute headways systemwide.

The bond box repair and possible rail replacement work was planned for Q1 2024. The bond box repair was to fix signal boxes embedded in the tracks that were damaged by joint bus-rail operation platforms. Rail replacement near Westlake station was being investigated to replace worn rails, resulting in

reduced long-term wear on equipment and better passenger experience. The entire northbound tunnel bore would close to allow contractor access and make the bond boxes electrically safe to work. The team was working with the Operations department to produce the least-impactful operating plan, and with the contractor to reduce the total duration of the work. This was combined with other piggyback projects such as the Eastlink plinth repair and Passenger Information Management System Variable Message Signs replacement.

Next steps included continued coordination of Downtown Tunnel single tracking closures for safety repairs, for the bond box repairs and rail replacement project, and for East Link systems tie-in, deliver monthly reporting on service disruptions to this committee, and continued development of a permanent office around the Passenger Impact Portfolio Plan to integrate this activity as a regular function.

Chair Walker asked if ridership support, via additional bus bridges outside of the tunnel, would be included in the 2024 committee work plan. Ms. Wrenn confirmed staff was working towards that goal. Chair Walker asked staff to share how riders could receive impact notifications and communications. Mr. Suraj explained that notifications were sent out through social media channels, signage around stations, and announcements. Mr. Arnold added that comprehensive communication plans based on how impact levels dictated the communication efforts and could range from stakeholder conversations, push alerts, and website announcements. As for bus bridges, Sound Transit partnered with King County Metro for those services and relied on their availability, which could affect the ability to have bus bridges. Chair Walker noted riders could sign up for rider alerts through the Sound Transit website. Mr. Arnold further explained riders could set their notifications based on preferred routes and/or stations. CEO Timm further explained staff's work to properly plan for these projected outages and attempt as early of communications as possible.

#### Improving ST2 Light Rail Passenger Experience

Matt Shelden, Deputy Executive Director of Planning and Integration, provided the presentation and began by summarizing what was discussed to the committee at its September 2023 meeting. The summary reviewed that light rail service levels would be constrained by limited fleet until the early 2030s, significant peak period crowding was forecasted as the 1 Line was extended to Lynnwood in 2024, to relieve crowding, the agency would need improved fleet availability and some continued ST Express service temporarily, there would be further relief when the 2 Line was extended to Lynnwood in 2025, and some renewed crowding was forecasted as Federal Way was extended in 2026 and through the early 2030s.

Mr. Shelden reviewed strategies that were intended to address service and crowding between the completion of the ST2 extensions to Lynnwood, Redmond, and Federal Way in 2026 and when additional light rail vehicles and maintenance capacity would become available in the early 2030s. Strategy 1 would get as many light rail vehicles in service as possible, which was discussed at the September 2023 committee meeting in context of extending light rail to Lynnwood in 2024. This same strategy would continue to be helpful as Redmond and Federal Way would open in the next few years. Maximizing the number of vehicles in service by completing retrofits and warranty repairs would allow the agency to run more trains with four cars instead of three, which would increase capacity and reduce crowding. Staff was focused on the newer Series 2 cars and were targeting improving daily availability from about 75 percent today to 85 percent when Lynnwood opens.

Strategy 2 would continue providing some bus service in corridors where there may be continued crowding on Link. This would provide an alternative and could help alleviate crowding on the train. Staff was working with agency partners at Community Transit to apply this strategy when the line was extended to Lynnwood in 2024. The strategy could be helpful beyond 2024 as ridership demand continued to grow. Staff would monitor ridership carefully as the system expanded and work with agency bus operating partners to see where continued ST Express service could provide relief for Link crowding.

Strategy 3 was in development and would change the Link service pattern to concentrate the capacity where it was needed most to address crowding, which was between Northgate and Downtown Seattle. Staff assessed turning back 2 Line service at Northgate rather than run it all the way to Lynnwood, which would allow more consistently to run 4-car trains between Northgate and Downtown. Mr. Sheldon reviewed the pros and cons to this approach. On the positive side, there would be an increase in capacity by about 14 percent in that part of the system, and as the analysis suggested, that could alleviate forecast crush loads though trains would still be very full. However, there would be a lot of challenges with this approach. First, it would mean less peak period service to Lynnwood, which was not consistent with community expectations and could affect how the broader transit system would connect with Link. Second, passengers coming from or going to destinations north of Northgate would either have to wait for a train to that destination or transfer to one after riding a train to Northgate. This could lead to passengers waiting for the right train, which could lead to uneven loads on the trains and on possibly crowded station platforms. Turnback operation would also introduce more complexity in how the system ran, which could add to delays, and would require additional operators and security personnel to ensure trains could turn around quickly at Northgate. Lastly, turnback operation required using the pocket track at Northgate in regular service, which would make it unavailable to store any train that might need to come out of service.

Strategy 4 was to buy 10 more Series 2 LRVs and tack them on to the end of the current order from Siemens for delivery around 2027. Staff would accelerate the purchase of 10 LRVs currently planned to come with the Series 3 order in the early 2030s. They would help run 4-car trains on the 2 Line more often, which would increase capacity on the system and help with crowding between downtown Seattle and Lynnwood. These cars would increase the fleet from 214 to 224 until the agency could start receiving new Series 3 cars in the early 2030s and would allow operations to run longer trains more often, adding capacity. They would, however, require the agency to get creative about where to store them since the operations and maintenance facilities and siding tracks would be full when they arrive. Staff was looking at opportunities for storage but had a lot more work to do. Another consideration in acquiring additional LRVs was cost. These cars would be cheaper to purchase now than waiting for the future Series 3 procurement because the agency already had an approved design and locking in the price now would reduce inflation. But the preliminary analysis suggested the earlier spending would result in a small decrease in agency financial capacity while net debt service coverage would be negligible.

Staff would continue the discussion at the next committee meeting by bringing information about achievable service levels and forecasted crowding as the ST3 system was built in the coming years. Staff would then spend several months developing mitigation strategies for ST3 system buildout similar to what was heard today for the ST2 system completion. Staff would return in February with those options to consider along with information about how each may affect the overall program affordability. Once that information was available, staff would look for Board direction about which strategies to pursue in March. Once a path was defined, staff would reflect that direction in various documents to guide implementation, including updating the long-range service plan, the agency financial plan, the rail fleet management plan, and the annual program review.

Staff recommended proceeding with three of the strategies to continue to improve fleet availability, consider buying 10 more Series 2 LRVs, and analyze augmenting Link with ST Express capacity in the south and north corridors. Staff did not recommend the Northgate turnback option due to reduction of service north of Northgate and complexities and risks that kind of operation would introduce to the system. CEO Timm explained that if the Board would like to move forward with additional purchasing of LRVs, that would occur in November 2023.

Chair Walker asked if there were downfalls to acquiring more Series 2 vehicles rather than Series 3. Mr. Shetty replied the impact could center around outdated technology.



Boardmember Baker asked if ST3 and ST2 vehicles were compatible with one another. Mr. Shetty replied that the vehicles were unique and could not be co-mingled.

#### Presentation on Innovation – Passenger-Facing Technology

Marie Olson, Acting Chief Passenger Experience and Innovation Officer, provided the presentation. The ST3 ballot measure included \$75 million to fund research and innovation. The ballot measure specifically included funding for deployment of technology to improve ridership. Ms. Olson noted that the ST3 ballot measure stated that innovative technologies or business practices that were developed through this program and subsequently incorporated into standard Sound Transit programs and practices would not need to be supported by the Innovation Fund following program development. That meant the technologies presented today would be proven with dollars from the Innovation Fund but would be incorporated into standard Sound Transit programs after they were proven. This meant operational costs would be assumed by department budgets in future years.

The purpose of the passenger-facing tech program was to improve passenger experience by investing in innovative solutions that removed real or perceived barriers to ridership and improve the dependability of information provided to passengers so they can make informed decisions that suit their mobility needs.

The Digital Assistant was a new digital tool that would be launched by Sound Transit through a multi-phased project that would deliver an integrated application. This tool would be accessed through mobile applications, a web-app on the Sound Transit website, and staff was currently evaluating the potential for it to be deployed to in-station kiosks. The features included trip planning, alerts delivered through push notification so if a trip was delayed, a push notification would prompt a new trip planning action for users that have saved trips, a chatbot for interactive support, and payment integrations. Ms. Olson explained ways in which this tool would differ from Google Maps or other transit apps. Generally, third party providers may not be incentivized to prioritize transit use, meaning they do not typically take a transit-first approach. Third party applications were not fully accessible for passengers who use screen-reading technology. Commercial providers may not include landmarks or stop IDs that transit passengers use. Third parties do not offer interactive support and a direct connection to Passenger Care. Third parties do not integrate with ORCA for payment and do not provide accurate walking or rolling instructions through stations or real-time vertical conveyance information. Accessibility and equity were core focuses to this project. Ms. Olson mentioned this was a regional solution, from the data and information that was incorporated to the branding, this tool was meant to serve transit riders across the entire region.

Phase 1, currently being executed in Q4 2023, would release native mobile apps for iOS and Android and a web app for use on desktop or mobile in a web browser. After Phase 1 launched, users would be able to plan trips, set preferences, and get push notifications about service. The agency was using Open Trip Planner (OTP) as the routing engine for this solution. OTP was a broadly used open-source trip planning engine that peer agencies have adopted such as TriMet and LA Metro. NY MTA just launched a beta test for a new app that was built on OTP. Countries like Norway and Finland also use OTP to support transit riders.

A new brand identity was introduced, the Sound RideGuide, which was made by combining a map location icon, a happy, friendly face that employed the letter G for guide, and a green hat which symbolized motion and travel. There was a strong connection between the name and visual that generated an engaging and memorable brand identity. This brand identity was perfectly suited for use in marketing campaigns and a wide variety of product promotions and extensions and was designed by a Sound Transit designer. Ms. Olson walked the committee through the app launching experience.

Phase 1 milestones included the completion of usability testing, which included a diverse group of users including 2 blind, 4 low vision, 2 with mobility/physical impairment, 1 Spanish language, and 1 orientation and mobility specialist. Bug fixes and other remediation had also been completed to respond

to this group's test experience. User Acceptance Testing was the final stage of software development or change request lifecycle before going live and was being conducted over a two-week period beginning October 30, 2023. In mid-November 2023, staff would conduct closed beta testing. The plan was roughly 30 internal testers focusing on testers who can test in Title VI languages or who have other specific expertise, details would be released through a news link and would also release to a select group of transit-specific media, bloggers, or active social media users. At the end of November, staff would execute the soft launch and public beta test, pending user acceptance testing test results. In mid-December, staff would soft launch the mobile applications for both Apple and Android users, also pending user acceptance testing results. The soft launch marketing tactics, which were scheduled to begin at the very end of November 2023, included targeted paid social, a Platform post, email to specific lists and a sneak peek for reporters. The risks to this project included quality of real-time information coming from PIMS, staffing risks, and vendor resourcing.

Phase 2 was interactive support with the AI-enabled chatbot with interactive voice response. The chatbot had three primary components including trip planning and Information component that were fed from OTP, FAQ and knowledgebase, which included answers to questions about lost and found, service animals, ORCA, and interactive support through live chat with passenger care staff. Phase 2 marketing was planned for Spring 2024 when the chatbot and interactive voice response features would roll out and would include a media buy such as ad buys at stations and additional social such as a media buy targeting folks who use Title VI languages, tools for engagement and more of a media push.

Phase 3 was fare payment integration with ORCA and would improve how fares were calculated on the back end. The agency's 2023 User Experience intern conducted user experience research on fare payment integration, surveyed and interviewed passengers, and designed screens for what this integration could look like. The third phase of this project was anticipated to complete in Q2 2025 but was dependent on the ORCA vendor and regional prioritization for payment integration.

Phase 4 could include kiosks in stations to better serve people who do not have access to smart phone technology, dynamic re-routing, similar to the app called Waze, so that if a passenger was actively on a trip, the RideGuide could re-route you based on known service disruptions, and single sign-on so you can use your preferred user ID to log in. Total cost for the first four phases of the Digital Assistant came to \$560,000. The usage-based fees for the chatbot, interactive voice response systems, and location-based services were dependent on usage and would be passed on from the vendor to the agency. Staff our anticipated for push notifications to replace reliance on expensive text messaging services and that the agency would actualize cost savings through this program. Also under consideration for phase four was sign language avatars to better serve people who communicated primarily through sign language and real-time elevator/escalator updates with walking or rolling instructions.

The team was currently leading a regional data quality and creation initiative, called the General Transit Feed Specification, to improve trip planner accuracy and provide contextual information passengers need to make informed decisions.

The team was also preparing to test accessible wayfinding technology. The agency's vendor, GoodMaps, provided a mobile app that allowed passengers to navigate stations in real time with step-by-step directions and included stop locations and amenities such as ticket vending machines, ORCA readers, and vertical conveyance and allowed passengers to select an accessible path that matched their mobility needs. Goodmaps was contracted to provide customizations that enabled a passenger who was deaf/blind to distinguish which train was pulling up in front of them at a platform and communicate real-time arrival information, including route, direction of travel and time of arrival for trains. Phase 1 of accessible wayfinding would occur in Q4 2024 at the International District Station and Westlake Station. Before it launched, staff would have conducted three rounds of user testing with 72 live user testers, many of whom had disabilities. If Pilot Phase 1 was successful, Phase 2 would occur at all Link stations. If the pilot was successful for Link, staff would submit this project expand to Sounder, T-Line, and ST Express facilities. The first five years of this project would cost \$1.78 million.

Phase 1 milestones, for the accessible wayfinding technology, included round two of user testing in mid-October 2023, engagement event with orientation and mobility specialists who train people with visual disabilities on how to navigate the transit environment in mid-October 2023, the third round of user testing would complete mid-November 2023, and a pilot launch and marketing kickoff would occur early December 2023 assuming successful user testing. Open Doors Organization had been contracted for pilot community engagement with specific populations. Marketing tactics included social media and a Platform post and bug fixes and revisions would be performed throughout testing and into the pilot to address user feedback.

Chair Walker asked about the timeline for the accessible wayfinding technology Phase 2 and 3. Ms. Olson replied Phase 2 was Spring 2024 and Phase 3 was Q2 2025.

Chair Walker asked if staff considered equity when mentioning the elimination of text message notifications. Ms. Olson replied staff would have that conversation when it nears that phase in the project and noted probability of having kiosks at stations when that occurred. Justin Deno, Program Manager for Passenger Facing Technology, added that notifications would have the ability to be delivered via email and provided another option other than SMS text. Push notifications were being studied to test its effectivity in eliminating SMS text, although there were no current plans to eliminate SMS at this time. Mr. Arnold added the program was not focused on eliminating text messaging but rather keeping in mind of ways to save the agency costs in terms of delivering messages through a platform called GovDelivery. The agency paid for each message that was delivered and if there was a shift in receiving notifications in an app versus through SMS, there could be potential cost savings to the agency. Phase 4 was still underway as far as timing but kiosk piloting would begin in 2024.

Chair Walker asked about integration assistance Phase 1 and how it would integrate with other systems and if ferries were included in that regional inclusion. Ms. Olson replied the back-end systems was where the collaborative efforts across regional transit agencies would ensure seamless communications. Mr. Deno added the GTFS was integrated from all regional partners and enabled trip planning across the region. Chair Walker asked if OneBusAway would deplete or be integrated with it. Mr. Deno committed to work with the proper staff to provide an in-depth response to Chair Walker's question.

**Executive session** – None.

**Other business** – None.

### **Next meeting**

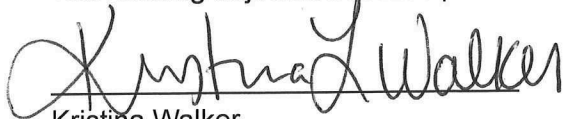
Thursday, November 2, 2023

1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

Ruth Fisher Boardroom and Virtually via WebEx

### **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 2:58 p.m.



Kristina Walker

Rider Experience and Operations Committee Chair

ATTEST:



Kathryn Flores

Board Administrator

APPROVED on November 2, 2023, JG.