



Summary Minutes

Rider Experience and Operations Committee Meeting February 1, 2024

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 Councilmember	(P) Ed Prince, Renton Council President

Board Members	
(P) Christine Frizzell, Lynnwood Mayor	(P) Dave Upthegrove, King County Council Chair
(P) Kim Roscoe, Fife Mayor	(A) Peter von Reichbauer, King County Councilmember

Josephine Gamboa, Board Relations Specialist, announced that a quorum of the committee was present at roll call. Board member Angela Birney joined as a non-voting member.

Report of the Chair

None.

CEO Report

Moises Gutierrez, Chief System Quality Officer, provided the CEO Report.

Unplanned closure of Westlake Station

On January 29, 2024, an emergency fan in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel (DSTT) stopped working which required an immediate close of Westlake Station.

This closure had a compounding effect on the existing service plan, requiring a bus bridge to be implemented between Capitol Hill and University Street stations with Link service continuing on both sides of those stations. Sound Transit Fare Ambassadors were deployed and redirected to assist passengers in navigating the bus bridge and plan the rest of their trip. Crews were able to implement a fix to get the fan back online and regular operations resuming within approximately three hours.

Both the current planned work underway and the unplanned fan outage highlighted the ongoing challenge of aging infrastructure in the DSTT and the efforts to stay ahead of it. Staff was in the process of developing a comprehensive plan to upgrade the necessary systems over the coming years, but similar issues would likely arise, and it would be essential for the agency to be prepared. Mr. Gutierrez thanked King County Metro for their quick action on implementing a bus bridge to keep passengers moving as the fan was being repaired.

Changes to Monthly Contract Reports

As part of implementing the TAG recommendations, the Board implemented changes to the Delegation of Authority that became effective January 1, 2024. As the agency began to report on contracts executed under the new delegation levels, there would be several changes including the simplification of reporting by providing a single report of all contracts to the full Board. The first single consolidated CEO Monthly Contracts Report would be included in Board member packets for the full Board meeting on February 22, 2024.

Activation Update – East Link Starter Line pre-revenue service

The revenue service date for East Link Starter Line would be announced over the next couple of weeks.

Public comment

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

The following people provided written comments:

Cascade Bicycle Club	Move Redmond
Feet First	Transit Trekker
Futurewise	Transportation Choices Coalition
Hopelink	Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle

The following people provided in-person comments:

Alex Tsimerman

The following people provided virtual comments:

Matthew Sutherland
Troy Serad
Zakariya Osman

Business Items

For Committee final action

January 18, 2024, Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting minutes

It was moved by Committee Vice Chair Prince, seconded by Board member Upthegrove and carried by the unanimous vote of all committee members present that the minutes of the January 18, 2024, Rider Experience and Operations Committee meeting be approved as presented.

Reports to the Committee

REO Metrics Presentation – Operations and Safety

Raj Cheriell, Director of Essential Data and Analytics, and David Wright, Chief Safety Officer, provided the presentation. This presentation focused on the Tukwila International Boulevard Station (TIBS) to review November and December 2023 data on a station level basis rather than as a whole.

For the month of December 2023, boardings reached a low of just under 2,000 riders with a high of nearly 3,300. On an average weekday, TIBS would see approximately 2,200 riders. Mr. Cheriell reviewed a graphic that showed passenger loads by time of day and reported many riders traveling northbound still had the ability to locate seating on the trains even with the heavier passenger load trips. Passenger loads were monitored for crowding purposes. For performance against schedule, TIBS experienced 89 percent on time performance and approximately 96 percent trips operated as scheduled.

Mr. Cheriell reviewed the TIBS daily custodial service summary over a week in November 2023. Many custodian shifts occurred but few were missed which primarily were during swing shifts. This was potentially caused by the November holidays and vacation time which lead to lower resources. It could also be caused by custodians responding to on-call situations to address larger custodial events such as cleaning of graffiti.

The TIBS vertical conveyances were at a 98.46 percent performance target for elevators and 99.95 percent for escalators. Passengers experienced .05 percent unplanned outages for escalators during December 2023. For security metrics, Mr. Cheriell noted security incidents fell drastically within the last two months of 2023.

Mr. Wright reviewed the security metrics. The top six incidents were tracked by the call types: assault (verbal or physical), biohazard (unsanitary acts on transit property), graffiti/vandalism (tagging or destroying property), medical (the team would perform medical checks on people that appeared to be asleep on property and sometimes that resulted in medical assistance), trespass (entering a restricted area, typically the tunnel), and unlawful conduct (engaging in other conduct that was inconsistent with Sound Transit standards of conduct such as loud music, smoking, and drinking).

At the end of August 2023, a camera trailer with motion sensors was deployed in an area of the Sounder right of way, near the Tacoma Link 25th Street station, where the agency had received information of significant unlawful crossings and loitering around the active railway. The rise of trespassers along the rail right of way indicated a problem with individuals crossing the rails and was a significant safety concern. In response, the team increased proactive patrols in the area and responded to each alarm that was generated by the sensors in the trailer.

The October 2023 increase in unlawful conduct stemmed from a high level of reported events at Kent Station with a mix of disorderly conduct. Most Sounder stations were commuter stations with active AM and PM commuter periods followed by little passenger traffic during non-peak periods. Kent Sounder station was also adjacent to the Kent Station Shopping Mall which provided more persons flowing through the station during non-peak hours as compared to other Sounder locations. Most of the unlawful transit conduct occurred at the bus platform. Kent Station had more bus bays and more bus connections than any of the other Sounder stations and passenger flows were more continuous in the off-peak periods when compared to the Sounder stations. The team had reached out to local schools to start conversations and was waiting on a response.

In 2023, security had doubled the permanent security coverage at the station and increased the frequency of mobile security patrols through the area. The team also had several law enforcement emphases targeting areas of concern. Another security trailer with camera and sensors was under current procurement to target specific areas.

Mr. Wright reviewed a chart that showed the total number of customer security concerns reported to Sound Transit each month during 2023 by mode. Concerns dipped significantly starting in May 2023 and remained consistent through the rest of the year. The increase for ST Express in October looked significant, however it was a total of seven reported concerns for the month compared to an average of 4 per month over the course of the year. On average, Sound Transit received 42 security related concerns every month in 2023.

Board member Frizzell referenced the decrease in security incidents displayed for November and December 2023 and how the agency would continue keeping those numbers low. Ken Cummins, Director of Public Safety, responded the TIBS security incidents decrease was primarily due to physical changes to station landscaping and barrier fencing along Southcenter Blvd and working closely with the police department to increase controls and have more stable presence from contracted security providers. Mr. Wright noted cameras were also added in trailers at the station which was proactive work to keep incident levels down.

Board member Roscoe asked why this meeting's metrics focused on TIBS. Mr. Cheriell reminded the committee that today's presentation was an example describing what an individual rider may experience if visiting TIBS – the station of focus was chosen at random. Board member Roscoe asked if these metrics were available to the public for other stations. Mr. Cheriell replied some stations had the data to expand into this level of detail but the metrics were primarily system level.

Chair Walker asked if the committee was able to request a particular station for focus at a later meeting. Mr. Cheriell confirmed.

Chair Walker asked if the passenger loads by time of day data consisted of exact data or average number of riders. Mr. Cheriell noted the team had ability to narrow down the data on a specific day but the presentation showed the average for the entire month of December 2023.

Chair Walker asked if there was a plan for improving the custodian levels of support. Suraj Shetty, Executive Director of Operations, replied a plan was in place to investigate how staff was deployed to certain areas.

Chair Walker asked if staff was aware of time frames of vertical conveyance outages as it would have varying impacts during commuting hours versus late evenings. Mr. Shetty staff researched where and when challenges took place with outages and how to be proactive towards crowding.

Chair Walker asked if there were interactions between Fare Ambassadors and security. Mr. Cummins replied those teams were in constant communication and there was continuous coordinating at all levels happening, such as weekend shut downs and ensuring efforts were not duplicated but there was sufficient resources and protection available to staff.

Passenger Impact Portfolio Plan

Pamela Wrenn, Deputy Project Director of Service Delivery, provided the report. For the Rail Replacement and Bond Box work, maintenance efforts in the DSTT that started on January 13, 2024, as near complete with the last work items being completed by the evening of February 4, 2024. A large section of curved rail near Westlake had been replaced as well as damaged rail in the same section that was discovered during the work. All 58 bond boxes in the tunnel were repaired, fiber surveys had been completed, southbound rail had been repaired, and Passenger Information Management System (PIMS) sign upgrades in the International District Station were nearly complete.

On weekends during the service disruption, bus shuttle service had operated on 10- to 15-minute headways between Sodo and Capitol Hill Stations. Link service on either end of the downtown core had been running every 15 minutes. This service model would be in place on the weekend of February 3 and 4, 2024 as work was wrapped up. A joint Sound Transit and King County operations team worked diligently to manage bus shuttle operations and would continue through the end of the event. During the event, the combined team responded to several passenger concerns including improving on-street signing and improving stop announcements on buses.

On weekdays, single tracking led to trains operating at much longer headways than usual in the tunnel, with turnback train shuttles providing service with greater frequency to the north and south. At times, particularly at the start of the disruption event, crowding temporarily increased headways in the single tracking segment beyond the planned 26 to 30 minutes. Intensive management and improved communications over the course of the disruption led to better headway and schedule adherence on typical weekdays. Even with multiple improvements put into place, recovery capabilities during the event remained constrained. This left operations vulnerable to sometimes lengthy cascading delays resulting from incidents, such as traffic accidents blocking the tracks. In these cases, passenger care, Fare Ambassador and security personnel were in place to inform passengers of the delays and assist with alternate transit routes.

Teams would continue to provide mitigation and communication to passengers during the last few days of this service disruption. Accurate data about the disruption remained available in apps like OneBusAway, Google Maps, and the Transit app which showed the custom schedule, including which trains end at the start of the single tracking segment and which trains continued through. Over 700 shifts of staff ambassadors had been working in the field to help passengers during this event, augmented by Fare Ambassadors and security personnel. Temporary signage was modified at every service change during the event, with improvements prompted by passenger input and staff observations along the route. Ambassadors and temporary signage would continue until the disruption event had concluded.

The electromagnetic interference (EMI) hangar replacement work would cause a smaller disruption planned for March 9 and 10, 2024 and require single tracking between UW and Northgate stations.

The East Link Signal System Testing into the DSTT was scheduled for June 1 and 2, 2024. This work required a full closure of the DSTT to run trains under test conditions. A bus bridge would serve passengers between Sodo and Capitol Hill stations.

Chair Walker asked if the graphic on slide 8 showed the backend system for light rail operations. Mr. Shetty replied the photo was from the Link control center and offered a visit to the committee to tour the control center which monitored trains, health of alignment, and so forth.

Briefing on parking program expansion engagement and initial recommendations

Alex Krieg, Director of Access, Integration and Station Area Planning, provided the report. He began by sharing the timeline of actions taken to follow Board direction to better manage agency parking facilities beginning with the System Access Policy in 2013. Through Resolution No. R2018-27, the Board authorized the permit parking program with goals to maximize ridership and prioritize parking availability during weekday morning peak period. The resolution included parameters such as cost recovery, performance-based pricing, eligibility, limited reserved parking, and certain discounts. The existing conditions and policy considerations for expanding the parking program included some facilities remaining very full despite changed travel patterns, new Link service would generate higher demand at seven new and five existing facilities, costs to build and operate parking could be offset by user fees such as fares, and the ST3 system and finance plans assumed parking revenue from fees.

Mr. Krieg shared themes heard from the public engagement conducted in fall 2023. Feedback included program goals to increase transit ridership, maintain parking availability, and simplify the passenger experience we more important, preference for a parking program that maintained reserved parking options with a narrower range of daily fee possibilities, most interested in single-day and monthly permits for solo drivers, and open-ended comments reflecting general unpopularity of charging parking fees given potential ridership impacts. When asked which program option people preferred, 48 percent chose tiered (\$2-\$4) with reserved, 34 percent chose flat (\$4) without reserved, and 18 percent chose variable (\$2-\$10) without reserved.

Key staff recommendations regarding the parking program update included maintaining a performance-based program with administrative implementation, continuing discounts to low-income passengers and carpoolers, expanding program scope to allow daily fees and full facility management and require regular reporting to the Rider Experience and Operations Committee on program performance, introducing a daily fee that could be charged at Link facilities and facilities with more than 70 percent utilization, maintaining reserved parking at the busiest facilities with more than 90 percent utilization, and starting simple with phase implementation and add features over time to ensure sustainable program success.

If the Board authorized an expanded parking program, the agency was prepared to begin implementation later this year with focus on Link facilities on the 1 Line with the upcoming extension to Lynnwood City Center station with plans to test demand for reserved parking at eligible facilities and launch with a daily fee of \$2 per day. Eligible facilities for parking management included Lynnwood,

Mountlake Terrace, Shoreline North, Shoreline South, Northgate, Redmond Tech, BelRed, South Bellevue, Tukwila International Boulevard, and Angle Lake stations. Staff did not currently expect to charge a fee after 2 p.m. or on weekends. The agency could expect full implementation at all eligible facilities by 2026. Prices for daily fees and reserved permits would be adjusted as the agency responded to program performance and parking demand.

Improved parking availability during peak periods and more open spaces for midday transit trips could impact transit ridership. As well as having some price sensitive passengers shifting to other modes or sharing rides to use free carpool permits, which would increase ridership. The forecast suggested a potential annual net revenue of approximately \$4 million to \$6 million by 2026. Expanded parking management was forecasted to generate approximately \$6-\$7 million in permit and daily fee revenue annually by 2026. This assumed annual cost of approximately \$1.5-\$2 million for program administration and enforcement services at up to 20 stations.

Staff would present the parking program expansion recommendations to the Rider Experience and Operations committee and present a recommendation to the Executive Committee at the March 7, 2024 meeting with potential Board action at the March 28, 2024 meeting. Staff also planned to return to the Executive Committee in March 2024 to provide a fare policy update briefing and take action at the April 2024 Executive and Board meetings.

Board member Frizzell asked if staff researched implementing fares for special events in Seattle. Mr. Krieg replied that had not been researched but the policy that would be proposed was designed for flexibility towards changing conditions and towards post pandemic travel behaviors which was being researched. Kevin Shively, Senior Transportation Planner, added that the existing policy that governed the parking program prioritized ridership and explicitly prioritized access for HOV and believed high carpools and vanpools during those events could be a way to maximize ridership within the program.

Board member Roscoe asked what would be included with the implementation over the next two years and if it contained SOV, multiple occupancy, daily rate permits, etc. Mr. Krieg replied there would be a fee for general daily parking and in-demand garages may have zones but was still under research.

Board member Roscoe asked about infrastructure with monitoring the spaces and payments. Mr. Shively replied that enforcement of payment would occur with license plate recognition and the vendor under contract prepared for that service at the stations applicable and garage employees would also provide monitoring.

Board member Roscoe noted Angle Lake station displayed signs that were faded, seemed painted over, and difficult to interpret and asked when those were installed. Mr. Shively responded some signs were installed in 2018 when the SOV permit program began, and many were covered.

Board member Birney asked if staff planned for this program to be in place as soon as new garages were opened or if there would be additional time without payment after the opening. Mr. Krieg replied it was difficult to anticipate high demand and decisions couldn't be made before the official opening. He shared the team's expectation for the program to be well established by 2026.

Chair Walker asked about what flexibility this program had to execute. Mr. Krieg replied the parking management action would take place in March 2024 to provide ample time to execute and the Fare Policy update action had more flexibility.

Chair Walker asked if the team was working with other local transit for support towards added service. Mr. Krieg replied they worked with partners on program design, such as King County Metro, pre-covid and also noted the vendor allowed cooperative purchasing if partner agencies were interested in following the agency's actions.

Innovation and Passenger Technology team update

Michael Berman, Deputy Director of Research and Innovation, provided the report. Innovation and passenger facing technology (PFT) was part of the Research and Innovation team within the Passenger Experience department. The team focused on using technology and pilot tests to improve the passenger experience. Staff would return later this year to present on the research program and results from the most recent Passenger Experience survey.

The program was funded by ST3 for research, analysis, and implementation of innovative best practices, partnerships, and technologies. The ballot measure included funding for deployment of technology to improve ridership or system performance, safety, or reliability, and for research into the best and emerging industry policies, practices, and business models. The goal with pilots was to test innovative technology quickly and cost effectively. By conducting pilots and testing prior to conducting large procurements, staff had the ability to fail fast to avoid investing in solutions that do not meet the needs and highlight risks and opportunities associated with the adoption of new technology. Through pilots, staff aim to use learnings to reduce the actual delivery time if a successful pilot spawned a new project, to generate insights to help evaluate true costs of adoption, and to plan for and conduct proper change management.

The program worked across the agency to identify pain points and implement projects. An interdepartmental group of stakeholders was created to provide unique perspective based on their knowledge, skills, and expertise as well as department or division goals. The group meets bi-weekly to work towards working team efforts and strategic planning. The working team promoted a better understanding of which challenges the Innovation Program should take on, increased contributions to problem-solving and decision-making, and support the adoption of Innovation Program outcomes that demonstrably improved agency performance. Strategic planning would help the program towards long-term success.

The PFT program, which would improve passenger experience and control costs, was working towards accessible wayfinding, Sound RideGuide, and Transit data (GTFS) improvements. Costs were being controlled by reducing duplicate systems, avoiding staff augmentation, researching cost effective alternatives to text messaging for alerts, and pursuing grant funding. Accessible wayfinding was currently in the public pilot period and could be tested at the International District station and Westlake stations. The Sound RideGuide would be released for public beta in 2024 and would be translated into six primary Sound Transit languages. In 2024, it would pilot new data sets that provided accessible walking/rolling instructions into stations and introduce chat and interactive voice response features by pursuing the use of large language models and the use of all available technologies to generate consistent reliable responses. Over the next two years, the pilot would integrate with elevator monitoring solution to provide real-time elevator/escalator outage information and alert passengers that accessible pathways were unavailable. In 2024, the agency would pilot a kiosk version of the Sound RideGuide to assess user experience, cost and operational changes required to support the larger implementation and consider sign-language avatar pilot to improve language access.

GTFS, or General Transit Feed Specification, was the specification agency data sets adhered to effectively communicate stops, routes, and schedule information to provide a consistent experience for riders who utilize the agency and third-party trip planning applications or websites that circulate transit information. The team was currently organizing a multi-year regional GTFS data quality and creation initiative. The goals of the initiative were to provide consistent rider experience, introduce new collaborative methods, establish shared practices that improve interoperability and consistency of regional mobility data, and provide timely updates to ensure a positive rider experience.

Viewing the Innovation Station Program through an equity lens, the program was generated to benefit people with disabilities and people with limited English proficiency which would ultimately assist all riders. Research was conducted in 2020 and 2023.

The program held its first attempt at breakthrough innovation/invention through accessible elevators. The program conducted user experience research which demonstrated passengers who were blind or deaf/blind that did not use Beacon Hill station due to inaccessible elevators. That placed the agency at risk of violating the ADA Effective Communication Rule. The user experience design based on research resulted using touch based on process of elimination of the five senses. There were three iterations of the device based on user research and engineering feedback. There were complexities and extensive barriers to installing physical devices in a highly regulated environment. In 2024, the program aimed to test vibration patterns and user interface to better understand deaf/blind rider communication preferences and establish baseline measurements that would enable understanding of how many seconds in advance a haptic notification was able to be delivered to enable a deaf/blind person to position themselves in front of the appropriate elevator before the doors opened.

For the internal grants program, \$250,000 was budgeted in 2024. This budget was set aside to provide funding for pilot tests if staff outside of the core Innovation and PFT team provided new ideas. Ideas were filtered before funding took place. Past projects through this piloting method included escalator maintenance reporting and overhead catenary reporting system.

Current in-house user experience efforts included studies to further the understanding of the cognitive load associated with navigating the Sound Transit system through the use of biometrics and opportunities to adapt in working environments to improve collaboration between teams who were in hybrid work environments and studies to support the pilots. Eye tracking, virtual reality (or a combination of eye tracking and virtual reality), and rapid prototyping were the three primary tools being used. Eye tracking could help decipher how passengers interacted with and understand agency signs and other features.

Board member Roscoe showed interest with the eye tracking program and thought it was a great way to develop a system that was user friendly.

Chair Walker asked if the eye tracking experiment used volunteers or people at stations. Mr. Berman replied it was used on volunteers.

Chair Walker asked if staff had worked with the Community Oversight Panel to gather ideas related to accessible elevators. Mr. Berman stated the team had worked with the Citizens Accessibility Advisory Committee but not the Community Oversight Panel. He offered to provide this presentation to them if there was interest.

Board member Frizzell spoke positively of the technology for sight and hearing-impaired riders.

Chair Walker asked when the user surveys took place. Mr. Berman replied the Passenger Experience survey took place in October through November 2023 and the team would return to this committee with results once available.

Final review of the 2024 Rider Experience and Operations Committee work plan

Chair Walker noted the inclusion of a follow-up presentation on coach sanitation conditions and vertical conveyances into the special topics of interest section based on suggestions provided by Board member Frizzell at the January 18, 2024, committee meeting.

Board member Roscoe asked the committee would receive a report from the Community Oversight Panel and asked whether there was interest in this committee interacting with them. Adam Montee, Senior Program Manager, replied the Chair of the Community Oversight Panel provides their report to the full Board and would have the work plan drafted in the coming months.

Board member Roscoe asked for more detail on how the Community Oversight Panel workplan was established. Mr. Montee replied that at an annual retreat, the group would draft a series of areas of interest. Sound Transit staff would then present to them with requested topics.

Board member Roscoe asked if the Board had provided items to work on or investigate in the past. Mr. Montee replied the Community Oversight Panel was created by the Board and passenger experience was amongst one of the topics to oversee and would potentially be available to explore other areas upon request.

Board member Roscoe and Chair Walker showed interest in having a joint meeting between the committee and the Community Oversight Panel.

Executive session – None.

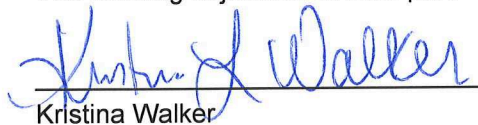
Other business – None.

Next meeting

Thursday, March 7, 2024
1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
Ruth Fisher Boardroom and Virtually via WebEx

Adjourn


The meeting adjourned at 2:33 p.m.



Kristina Walker

Rider Experience and Operations Committee Chair

ATTEST:



Kathryn Flores
Board Administrator

APPROVED on March 7, 2024, JG.