

*6/6/2024 Rider Experience and Operations
Committee Meeting Written Public
Comment Submissions*

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Max Sgro

Dear Sound Transit Board of Directors,

I am very concerned about the current safety protocols on the Link Light Rail, and in light of the stabbing that occurred on Saturday May 11th at the Capitol Hill Station would urge you all to take action immediately. There should be zero tolerance for anti-social activity throughout the light rail system as this breeds a feeling of lawlessness and an anything goes attitude among some passengers. You must consider policies that restrict access to individuals that are posing safety risks to transit users. These are some proposed actions I hope you consider:

1. I strongly recommend you consider rolling out fare gates at future stations, and over time at the most highly used stations - this would raise the barrier to access for individuals who are not using the trains for transit purposes. As a frequent light rail user I've found the current fare ambassador program to be inadequate. Individuals have learned that all you need to do is ignore their questions, and they will move on - this is an ineffective strategy to inspect fares, and the money would be better spent in infrastructure upgrades that would require a paid fare to enter stations.
2. Additionally, transit security should be required to remove individuals from trains and stations that they interact with and that have no paid ticket.
3. Finally, there should be more frequent law enforcement visibility throughout trains and stations. The current transit safety contractors have improved response times, but are limited in the action they are willing or able to take when they encounter a disruptive situation.

The current situation on the light rail makes for an unpleasant riding experience for those of us that have paid for a ticket and are using transit to go about our daily lives. The Board must take additional action to ensure that Sound Transit delivers safe service to the residents of King County.

Thanks,

Max Sgro

Seattle, Washington

Cliff Olmstead

Hi members,

I love light rail and am looking forward to the expansions.

However, the occasional open drug use on trains, occasional mental health episodes, and the apparent inability or unwillingness of transit security to consistently address these issues when they occur is a huge concern.

Some people I've spoken with, who will soon have access or already have access to light rail, are afraid to use it because of these issues. Especially at night or in times of lower usage (fewer people around to help in case of threatening behavior).

My suggestions:

- Turnstiles where feasible at major stations. No ticket, no entry
- Improved responsiveness of security to actively address drug usage or threatening behavior immediately (while limiting use of force)
- Stronger fare enforcement, especially now that we're out of the pandemic

Sincerely,

Cliff Olmsted

Mike Rajan

Hi,

I am one of the many who live in Seattle proper and work downtown. The state of our public transit is embarrassing when compared to that of similar sized cities across the country (was in SF last week for business, Muni was clean, on time and felt safe throughout my stay). I am not referring to lack of investment and ability to execute on a vision (although I wish we were more progressive like the rest of the world when it comes to transit), but rather the lack of enforcement of our most basic rules. The number of times I've witness flagrant drug use and people experiencing mental health breakdowns is unacceptable. The new fare enforcement is an amazing step and one that has led to my feeling a little hope that we can right this ship. However, that's not nearly enough. The number of times I have seen transit security do nothing about major issues on trains is tough to accept. The number of people who I talk to who "don't feel safe" on our transit is disheartening. In a company all hands last week, a highly voted question was "can we move our Seattle office to the east side?". That question isn't just about transit but more the general state of downtown. However, transit security was a main factor. Seattle is an economic powerhouse for the entire country. Like many, I moved here to contribute to the amazing tech that is produced here. I'm sick of writing this same type of message year after year, but WE NEED OUR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO ENFORCE THE MOST BASIC RULES THAT WILL ALLOW OUR SOCIETY TO PROSPER. We need you to do your part: Enforce fares and provide reliable, safe, drug free transportation. We need to start prioritizing the needs of the masses. Seattle has really gone down hill since the pandemic, it needs to improve or I for one will not continue living here.

Best,

Mike

J. Johnson

Lately every time I ride on a train there is a person sleeping, throwing a fit, dumping food/drinks or vomiting on the floor, or smelling up the car. The smell was so bad last week there were five of us that got off at the next stop and ran to a different train. When we are on link light rail trains, we are "trapped". If violence erupts on the train, passengers can't escape until the next stop. We need more enforcement on trains, in addition to turnstiles, to keep the trains clean and safe so working people can continue to use the Link Light Rail system.

Rebecca Chapman

Dear Board Members

I just read in the Seattle Times about the estimated number of riders who aren't paying their light rail fares.

I live in Tacoma, and often take the commuter bus from Tacoma Dome to Downtown Seattle, and often ride the light rail starting from King Street Station. The first time I rode the light rail, I didn't even SEE where I was supposed to tap my Orca card, so I rode for free. It was not my intention, but that's what happened.

This weekend we were in Seattle and rode the light rail to a few stations. We were I believe at Beacon Hill, where we had to tap to get the elevator to open. But only one of us needed to tap, and about six additional people got on the elevator. And boom, we were on the platform, with no need (or access!) to tap to pay.

I lived in the UK for many years and would frequently ride the Tube or the train. I also lived in Washington DC and rode the Metro. It's crazy to me that you offer this "honor" system that is both unclear how to use, and quite frankly, easy to dodge. I don't understand how hiring people to check fares is going to resolve the problem and plug the hole.

Also, I would think there would be difficulty in hiring and keeping FTEs who are going to challenge riders. I would also suggest that as a board, you try to do this, and see what the reaction is from riders. I think you will find hostility, swearing, possible physical reaction, and of course, people just getting at the next stop. Having a ticket checker is not a solution. There is no "threat" of getting caught. What is the penalty? How do you even detain the person?

I encourage you to install turnstiles. This is the only equitable solution to plug the fare hole . As a board, I encourage you to ride the light rail and get on and off at each stop. You will see the difficulty in both finding the Orca tap machine, and the confusion for honest riders who don't know what to do. You will also see many people who don't care. If you want to have a reputable and somewhat financially solvent transit system, you need to treat it like other successful transit systems, with turnstiles. Just put them on the platform. Tap for exit only. One at a time. If someone jumps it, have cameras and try to monitor those people for future citing or whatever.

Thank you for reading my letter and I hope you will be able to make some changes that appropriately and EQUITABLY charge ALL riders, and not just the ones who may get caught.

Sincerely

Rebecca Chapman

Tacoma, WA

Phil Bogatyrev

Hello,

My name is Phil, I'm a Seattle city resident and a light rail user. I'm concerned with the public safety situation on the light rail, where passengers get subjected to physical violence and sexual assault specifically by people most of whom do not pay their fares. I urge you to improve safety on the light rail by installing turnstiles.

Best,

Phil

Stefan Cordova

First Comment:

Light rail security don't do jack shit! They are a waste of money. Seriously, people smoking fatty on the train and they don't do anything! Their company will fire the officers if they do intervene. What is the point of having security if they can't do anything?! FIRE THEM!!!! FIRE THEM!!! FIRE THEM!!!!

Also time for all of you to start riding the damn train! If you actually rode the train, you would realize it's not safe. The people riding the train know it's messed up. GET OFF THE BOARD OR RIDE THE DAMN TRAIN AND KEEP THE LIGHT RAIL SAFE!!!

Second Comment:

I want to commission a study. Crime on light rail vs. car. I've personally had to shield my young kids from fatty smoking homeless guys and a man carrying an AK. My friend watched a homeless jerk off in front of him. Not to mention the thousands of others who complain all over Reddit. So you actually want to do something useful? Commission a study for the amount of crime that occurs per billion miles.

Compare that to users in their car. Then see which one is safer and tell me you won't do anything to KEEP US SAFE!!!

Santiago

First Comment:

Hi. I simply love all the progress Sound Transit has made over the years. I love the Orca cards. I love the bike lockers. I love the accessibility of connecting rail to bus and bicycle trail. I love the hours of operation. I love the express bus connections. Wasnt a fan of the Everett express no longer going downtown.

I do not love how society dumps its criminally insane at the transit stations. I don't like how the gangs of degenerate congregate there, like at Northgate.

Mostly I hate that I have to remember to tap off. I can easily remember to tap on.

Maybe generate more fare by giving Orca Card holders a deal while charging significantly more for cash users. If you ever opt for credit card payments on the bus, please consider the same of charging more vs Orca Card. There has to be a way to gouge tourists while favoring local working class.

Less bums and criminally insane drug addicts would be nice.

Connecting light rail to West Seattle is really gonna change the vibe.

-Santiago

SE Alaskan seasonal worker/rider

Second Comment:

Hi. I was also thinking, if you haven't been reading online comments about the fare ambassador program. Maybe Sound Transit should communicate in a way that the Pacific Northwest respects- play victim. Make commercials about how skipping fare and cheating public transit hurts the community and disabled and people of marginalized communities.

Its like littering and being racist, people dont know they are jerks, until they are educated.

And maybe do a campaign in the schools about how they get free rides, but eventually have to become responsible adults that care for their community by paying their fare.

Goodluck!

-Santiago

SE Alaskan Seasonal Rider

Stephen Fesler

Good morning boardmembers:

I'm contacting you about an unchecked rider experience issue: station audio systems at Link stations. Simply put, they are very poor and a nuisance to riders. At this point, riders would have expected substantive improvements, but agency staff have failed to make the system better after launching many more announcements. It's making stations palaces of auditory horror. I wrote an op-ed (see linked or attached) about the issue and solutions to them. I hope that at least one boardmember will broach the subject at today's REO meeting. Please stand up for rider issues like this every meeting. We need you to be pushing staff to do better around rider experience.

Kind regards,

Stephen A. Fesler