

# Memo

July 29, 2024

To:	Goran Sparrman, CEO Sound Transit
Thru:	Moises Gutierrez, Deputy CEO, Chief Program Oversight Officer Branden Porter, Acting Chief Safety Officer
From:	Victoria Morris, Acting Project Director - Safety Leda Chahim, Deputy Executive Director - Government & Community Relations Seth Daphne Esmeson, Program Manager - Transit Safety
Subject:	Rainier Valley at-grade crossing community engagement

## At-Grade Crossing engagement background

In 2022, Sound Transit (ST) transformed its engagement in the Rainier Valley to be more proactive and intentional than the previous incident-responsive engagement and communication efforts. An important goal of the At-Grade Crossing (AGC) program is to meaningfully engage the Rainier Valley community, with an emphasis on safety as ST's top priority and one of the agency's core values. We do this by:

- building and sustaining relationships with community
- increasing two-way communication between community and ST
- establishing ST as a long-term member of the Rainier Valley community.

Centering our work around equitable safety outcomes is critical, and our engagement approach is designed to meet community where they are, providing a diversity of convenient and accessible points of connection. Our AGC program spans all the at-grade segments ST owns and operates, and we brought on an engagement and communications consultant in 2024 to continue to grow our program emphasis in Rainier Valley and beyond. See below for additional information on our previous engagement efforts (i.e. 2022-2023).

## Methods and strategies

As part of the current 2024 AGC Engagement Plan, ST is continuing to build on previous engagement strategies to reach community members where they are to inform the future of safety enhancements in the area. We plan to employ a variety of engagement strategies that meaningfully engage communities in the Rainier Valley. Our current engagement plan includes:

- *Qualitative survey*—ST is deploying a survey about safety enhancements made in the corridor, possible improvements, and how ST is communicating about AGC work.
- *Listening sessions*—ST is reaching out to approximately fifty organizations, groups, and businesses in Rainier Valley to listen to concerns about safety in the area and share information about potential safety enhancements and current projects. We'll also ask about other groups and venues where community gathers to learn about future opportunities to reach communities in the Rainier Valley.

- *Fairs and festivals*—ST is attending fairs and festivals from Columbia City to Rainier Beach this summer share out progress, hear concerns, and collect feedback from community members about safety around tracks and trains in Rainier Valley.
- *Safety ambassadors*—every year during Rail Safety Week, ST staffs a strong presence of safety ambassadors to highlight our safety messaging and spread information about the latest improvements or projects. Moreover, ST Security staff are trained to encourage riders to interact safely around trains throughout the year.
- *Community events, such as transit safety town halls*—as Board members, community, and agency partners schedule community events or town halls, Sound Transit engages with community about current and upcoming projects.

ST is planning to develop a longer-term engagement strategy that will be informed by upcoming Board and community conversations. We are also thinking about how to incorporate additional events informed by our engagement with community-based organizations and partners to broaden our reach—showing up where communities gather, providing interpretation and translated materials, and engaging online and in-person.

## **Equitable engagement**

We understand the importance of reaching communities of color as well as low income, limited English proficiency, and other vulnerable populations that must be centered in our outreach efforts. Centering equity is essential for the success of engagement in Rainier Valley.

One significant barrier to engagement is language and translation. Our qualitative survey is translated into six languages: Arabic, Chinese, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. These languages are the most spoken in Rainier Valley according to our internal GIS analysis using American Community Survey data.

In addition to translating our engagement materials into the most spoken languages, we also offer interpreter services at community briefings and tailored listening sessions. Offering interpretation services is one of many ways that we can tailor our engagement for an organization or community group. Additional ways we tailor our outreach are:

- *Timing*—conventional business hours are not often the most convenient for community members to give feedback. In addition to attending after-hours fairs and festivals, our group listening sessions are available after work hours and weekends. Whichever time works best for community members, we strive to accommodate.
- *Format*—presentation-style briefings are not always the most accessible to community members. From conversations and listening sessions to briefings on specific AGC projects, we can find a way to communicate that works best for community members.
- *Online vs in-person*—not everyone has access to the internet. So, when we collect survey responses or provide information, we offer a physical version of our materials.

- *Atmosphere*—before hosting listening sessions, we ask: does the venue we chose invite participation and engagement? When we join community members at their events, we ask: does our process reflect, honor, and welcome the community?
- *Location*—town halls on Sound Transit’s campus can be hard for community members to attend, so much of our engagement is designed to meet community members where they are. With that in mind, we think about convenience and ease of accessibility when selecting locations.
- *Partnerships* – Partnering with community-based organizations to join events they already host, or to be the convener can improve comfort amongst attendees and provide valuable insights into the best approach for successful engagement.

## **Previous engagement from 2022—2023**

Annually, the AGC program sponsors events and seeks partnerships in the Rainier Valley as part of the ongoing at-grade crossing programmatic work. Planned activities focus on participating in established community events. During 2022 and 2023 events included:

- Community Safety Walks
- Cinema Under the Stars
- Columbia City Farmer’s Market
- Othello International Festival
- Rainier Beach Back2School Bash
- Rainier Beach Boo Bash
- Rail Safety Week staff ambassador presence in partnership with Operation LifeSaver

Additionally, in 2022, the AGC team contacted over 30 community-based organizations, either located in the Rainier Valley or serving the area, inviting them to participate in conversations with ST staff. The project team held nine virtual community conversations with those who were interested in participating in conversations. The project team also surveyed operators and the ADA community for feedback and collaborated with SDOT to collect enhancement ideas.

In July of 2023, Sound Transit deployed a security emphasis team in the Rainier Valley to enhance overall passenger safety and security at stations. This security team also builds positive relationships, encouraging compliance with laws and regulations, and promoting safety around tracks and trains. In the second half of 2023 the team made 462 crossing education contacts. Overall, this program has received positive feedback from the community.