

Sounder South Strategic Plan Update

*System Expansion Committee
6/13/2024*



Why we are here

- Overview of the Sounder South Strategic Plan Update
- Discuss revisiting Sounder South priorities to address demand: longer platforms (2036) vs. adding trips with BNSF negotiations (2046)
- Seek Board support for staff engagement with BNSF to prioritize additional trips

Sounder South Strategic Plan Update

Goals

- Revisit Sounder South expansion priorities established in 2020: longer platforms (2036) vs. adding trips with BNSF negotiations (2046)
- Identify opportunities for potential new Sounder ridership markets

Activities

- Community engagement
- Demographics & equity research
- Peer agency review
- Ridership forecasting analysis



Community engagement results

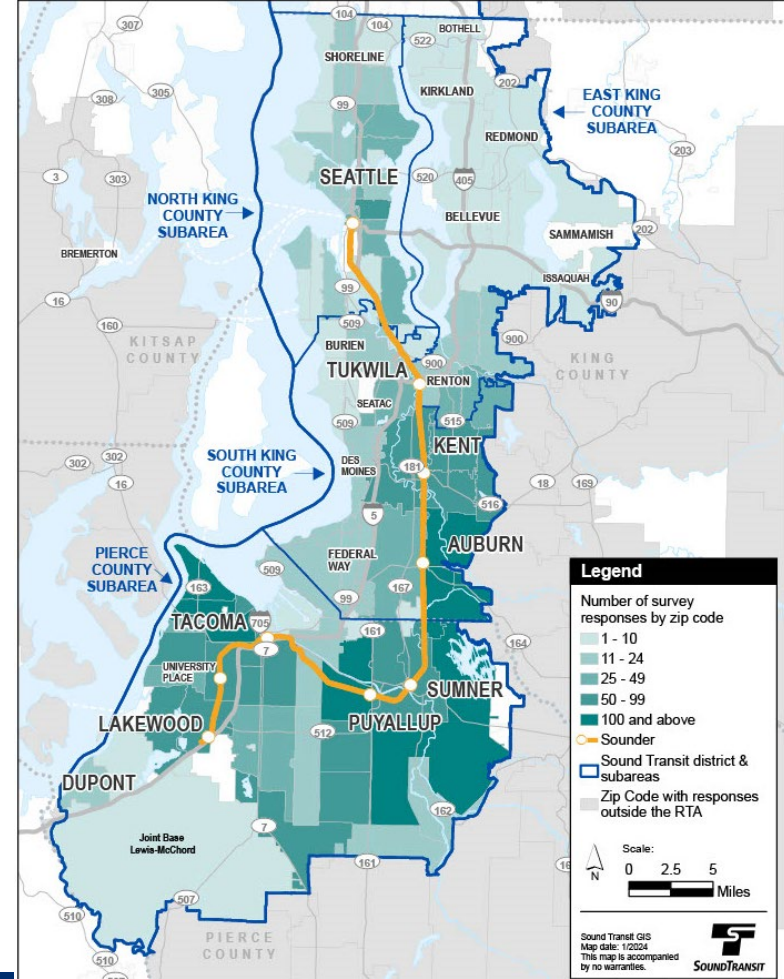
Community engagement

Approach

- Online open house for over 4 weeks
- Translated into 8 languages
- 4 focus groups with underserved communities
- 13 community & rider tabling events
- 13 stakeholder interviews + 6 org. presentations

Results

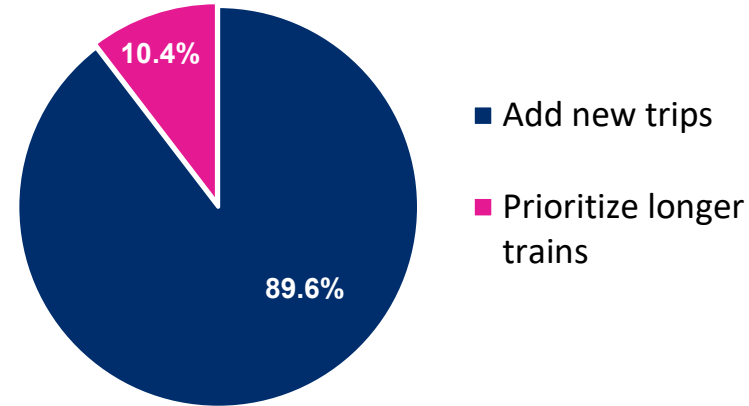
- Over 5,600 survey respondents
- 40% identified as nonriders
- 26.4% self-identified as people of color
- 24.8% reported household income under \$75K
- 462 stated that a language other than English is regularly spoken at home



Survey findings

- 90% prefer new trips over longer trains
- 81.6% would add weekend service
- 57% would add weekday service
- 75.3% support reducing frequency during peak periods to add trips at other times

Preference of all respondents
(5,533 total responses)



Current rider preferences

- Majority of frequent riders (79%) prioritize more trips over longer trains
- Frequent riders: slightly less support for reducing the frequency of peak period trains

Demographics and Equity Study

Demographics and equity study

Goal

- Understand how Sounder South could better meet the needs of the communities it serves, particularly low-income individuals and people of color.

Data sources

- Replica cell phone travel data (October 2022)
- ORCA card taps on Sounder and nearby bus routes
- King County Metro Rider/Non-rider survey (2023)

Finding: Strong potential demand for trips off-peak and weekends

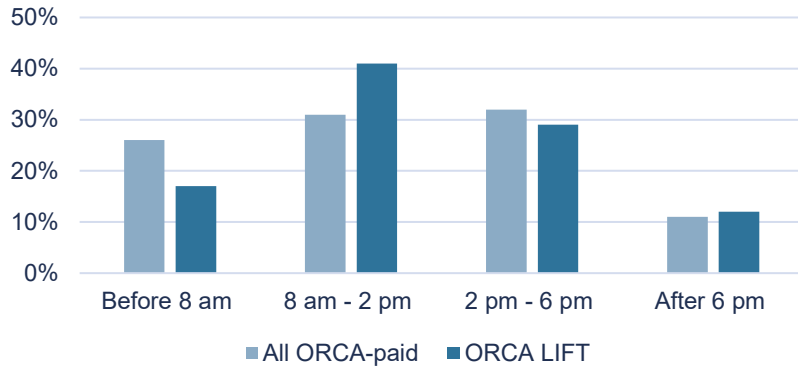


- 70-80% of weekday travel (all modes) occurs when Sounder has no or limited service. *(Cell phone data)*
- The number of trips taken on Saturdays is similar to the number on weekdays. *(Cell phone data)*

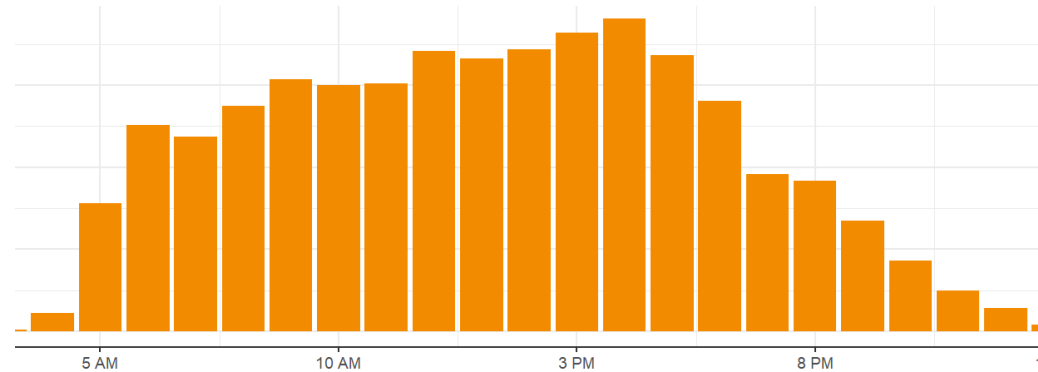
Finding: Lower-income bus riders have significant midday travel (weekdays)

- Many ORCA Lift taps on bus routes along the Sounder corridor are midday (outside current service window)

Weekday bus ORCA taps



Weekday bus ORCA LIFT taps



Demographics & Equity Study Findings

- **General travel patterns are not matched with Sounder availability** (*Weekday Orca Taps data source*)
 - No weekend service, even though number of trips is similar to weekday levels
 - Peak-oriented service only serves a small percentage of potential trips
- **Current lower-income transit trips are less peak focused** (*Orca Lift taps data source*)
- **Prioritizing new trips is an opportunity to serve new markets**
 - Off-peak / Weekend
 - Shorter distance trips between stations

Peer agency review

Peer agency review key findings:

- Peak ridership down for all systems versus pre-pandemic levels
- Demand for evening and weekend service returning faster than peak periods
- Peers are adjusting service to meet demand
- Regional rail ridership is rebounding at a higher rate than commuter rail
- Regular coordination with BNSF is vital and could be mutually beneficial

METROLINK

(Los Angeles, CA)

U T A 

(Salt Lake City, UT)

MARC

(Washington,
DC)

Metra

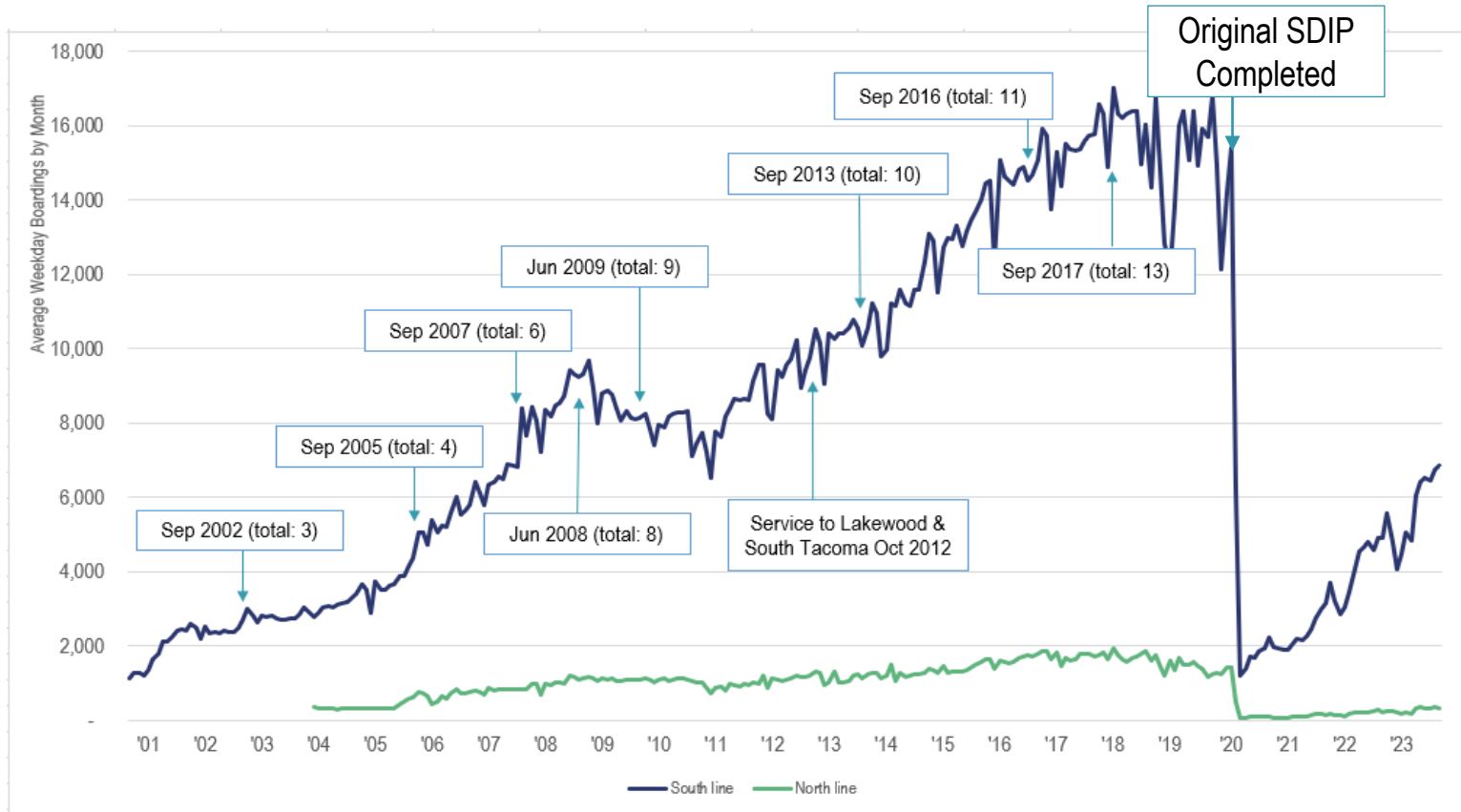
(Chicago, IL)



(Northern Virginia)

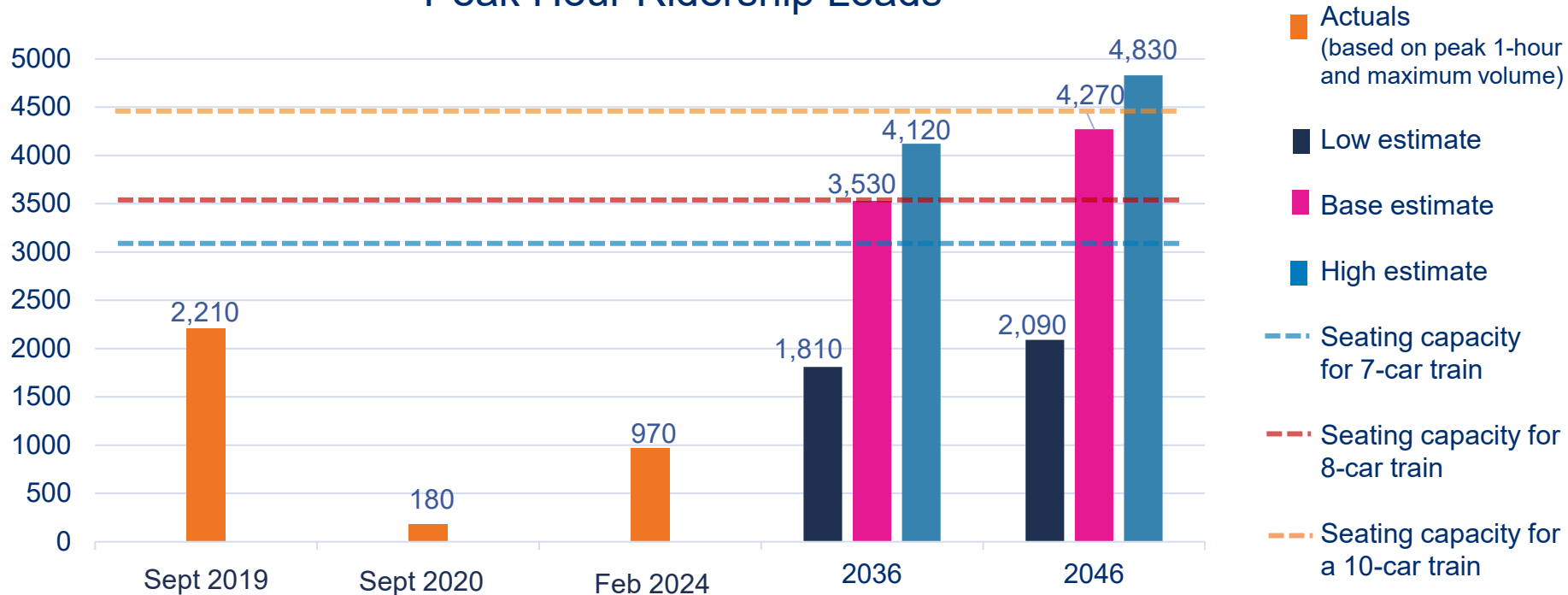
Ridership forecasting

Sounder Ridership Trends: 2000 to 2023



Ridership forecast for 2036 & 2046

Peak Hour Ridership Loads



Estimates assume 13 roundtrips per weekday

Past

Future

Sounder South Opportunity

Conclusions

- Ridership analysis shows platform extensions not needed before 2036
- Seek federal funds unique to Sounder to support additional trips
- Engage with BNSF now – long lead time on easement negotiations
- Continue to review ridership and market trends during initial BNSF discussions to evaluate most beneficial service additions

***Advance Additional Roundtrips (~~2046~~ 2036) before
Platform Extensions (~~2036~~ 2046)***

Proposed Next Steps

- Seek Board support for staff engagement with BNSF, prioritizing adding trips
- Establish regular coordination meetings with ST & BNSF
- Keep Board updated on discussions



Thank you.



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