

## Sound Transit 3 Expert Review Panel

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January 21, 2016

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Dear Madam and Sirs,

In late November we sent you a letter that summarized several major issues identified by the Sound Transit 3 (ST3) Expert Review Panel at their November 9/10 meeting. We presented those issues to the Sound Transit Executive Committee on December 3rd.

In that letter we said that we would follow up with a second letter that included additional comments or questions from Panel members. The following represents the further comments from the Panel members from the November meeting.

### O&M Cost Comparisons

We have compared original O&M costs for Sound Move and ST2 projects (as projected at the time of the ballot), with actual O&M expenses or current estimated costs. As we mentioned in our earlier letter, Sound Transit has shown a history of having actual O&M costs track closely with forecasted costs. However, we would also like to see the corresponding comparison of the originally assumed service levels versus the actual or currently projected service levels. This will help us better understand the comparison. We would like to know what the service level assumptions (hours of service) were for Sound Move and ST2 for light rail, Sounder and express bus service, as compared to current service level estimates or actual hours of service.

### Capital Replacement Reserves

Panel members would like to better understand how Sound Transit creates its capital replacement reserves, and how those reserves have been used. How are estimates derived for the level of replacement reserves needed? How does Sound Transit differentiate among its different capital assets when establishing the level of the replacement reserves? Are ST's practices consistent

with FTA guidance or standard industry practice? Why are they considered capital, rather than operating expenses?

### Access to Sound Transit Stations

One of the evaluation measures used by Sound Transit to evaluate each ST3 candidate project is a metric assessing the opportunity for non-motorized access to facilities. The metric is based on the number of nearby intersections. The Panel believes that in addition to the use of that metric it would be helpful to estimate the number of people who can walk to the station, based on existing and proposed land use densities. The density of forecast population and jobs within a half-mile radius would help the board better understand non-motorized access opportunities.

The Panel suggests that when considering the access issues for each light rail station, it would be helpful to understand the assumed mode splits for access to/from each of the light rail stations. For example, what assumptions are being made regarding the volume of public transit and private transportation services (i.e., the Microsoft Connector service, Uber, Lyft, etc.) at the light rail stations? What kind of impacts will this have on station facilities? Are accommodations being made in the conceptual station designs for these services?

Panel members would also like to understand what analysis has been done to assess the demand for parking at light rail station facilities. The Panel has a specific question about the demand for parking at, and near, the end of light rail lines (particularly in Tacoma, Everett and Redmond), where the demand shed for one station may be a large area.

### Ridership Forecasts

The Panel will be discussing Sound Transit's ridership forecasting methodology at its upcoming meeting. However, based on the recent conference call to discuss ST3 candidate projects, Panel members have several requests for additional information.

The Panel continues to have discussions with Sound Transit and Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) staffs about regional population and employment forecasts. It is important for the Sound Transit Board to understand that the ST3 project ridership forecasts are highly dependent on the volume and location of population and employment growth being estimated. The Panel has learned that the regional forecasts drive the ridership estimates more than variables such as the future cost of parking, highway tolling, or even the changes in future alignment of the service.

We have not completed our work yet. We understand that Sound Transit staff will be using updated PSRC population and employment forecasts to estimate ridership once the Board makes decisions about what to include in a draft system plan.

The Panel would like to know what recent changes were made by PSRC in the regional employment and population forecast. Specifically, where are the changes occurring, and why are they occurring? We understand that employment estimates will be reduced by approximately 200,000 and we would like to understand how that decrease will affect ridership forecasts.

The Panel members would also like to see the origin and destination data for the Lynnwood to Everett light rail project options (N-02), and for the I-405 Bus Rapid Transit project (E-02).

### Cost Effectiveness and Travel Time Comparisons

In our August 11<sup>th</sup> letter we suggested that Sound Transit consider creating several cost effectiveness measures in their project evaluation process (for example, project cost per rider and cost per new rider). We have learned that staff will include cost effectiveness measures in their evaluation of the draft system plan. The Panel would like to know what cost effectiveness measures will be used in analysis of the draft ST3 system plan, and the methodology for conducting that analysis. The Panel believes the Board should have an indication of the cost effectiveness of the proposed investments before they develop a draft system plan or make a final decision.

The Panel would also like to see a travel time comparison between proposed light rail projects, and current and future auto travel times, and current and future transit travel times for several of the large light rail extension projects.

### Light Rail Operations

Panel members had several questions regarding the operations of the light rail system, and the extensions of the system being considered by the Board. Panel members would like to know whether Sound Transit has considered express service or skip stopping for light rail service. We would like to better understand the thinking about the potential value or constraints of that type of service.

After the Panel's November meeting, at the December Board workshop, staff shared with the Board a new concept for light rail systems operations. The new option includes a light rail line from Everett to West Seattle, another line from Everett to Redmond, and a third line from Ballard to Tacoma. For the new Light Rail System Operations Option #3, the Panel would like additional information about how and where the Tacoma to Ballard and Everett to West Seattle light rail lines will be connected. How will this affect system operations and the need for maintenance bases?

### Project Discussions with Outside Agencies

The Panel noted that the templates for ST3 candidate projects included a listing of potential project partners. The Panel would like to encourage Sound Transit to engage with environmental regulators and local jurisdictions in the planning process to discuss efficiencies and strategic partnerships. Discussion topics could include coordinated project scopes, programmatic regulatory compliance approaches, and infrastructure partnering opportunities in areas such as large-scale shared stormwater treatment facilities or leasing air space rights for solar application.

The Panel will meet again on February 8 and 9. We will follow up that meeting with additional comments and questions based on our discussions. In the meantime, if you have any questions about this letter we would be happy to meet with you for further discussion.

Sincerely,

Jim Jacobson  
Chair

Cc: Expert Review Panel Members  
Ric Ilgenfritz, Sound Transit  
Amy Scarton, WSDOT