

**THE SEATTLE TRANSIT ADVISORY BOARD**

**RESPONSE TO THE**

**DRAFT SEATTLE TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

**October 25, 2023**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents.....	1
Background and Summary.....	2-3
Overview.....	4
Transit Element Goals .....	4-9
Opportunities and Emerging Trends.....	10-11
Challenges.....	11-13
Frequent Transit Network.....	13-16
Center City Connections.....	16-17
Seattle Streetcar and Culture Connector.....	17-18
Metro and Sound Transit Capital Programs.....	18
Community and Mobility Hubs.....	19-20
Transit Spot Improvements.....	20
Bus Layover Coordination.....	21
Freight and Bus (FAB) Lanes .....	21
Innovative Transit Streets.....	21-22
Access to Transit .....	22-23
Alternative Service Modes.....	23-24
Transit Technology and Systems.....	24
Fleet Electrification.....	24
Transit Asset Management.....	25
Measurable Outcomes.....	25-26
How the TAB Measures Success.....	26-28
Conclusion.....	28

The Seattle Transit Advisory Board (TAB) is pleased to present its response to the Draft Seattle Transportation Plan, and thanks everyone at SDOT for their time and energy in creating this draft 20-year transportation plan. Our comments and suggestions will focus on the Transit Element section, but we understand that all modal boards and their associated sections are vital for the success of this project.

## **BACKGROUND:**

For readers who may not know about the TAB, we were created in March 2015 after the passage of City Council Resolution 31752, and have several transit related mandates to follow, the most important one being to provide public oversight to the revenues collected from the Seattle Transit Measure (STM), approved by the voters in 2020, and formerly known as the Seattle Transportation Benefit District (STBD) Proposition 1 (2014-2020). There is approximately \$50M available each year from 2020-2027, to assist in Seattle's transit needs, with the biggest expenditure being the purchase of additional hours for transit operations, drivers, and maintenance care, as needed and proposed by SDOT. We are also tasked to provide a representative to the Levy Oversight Committee (LOC) formed after the Levy to Move Seattle passed in 2015, and we fully participate in all City of Seattle transit issues and concerns, like the STM, this Seattle Transportation Plan, the upcoming Comprehensive Plan, Vision Zero project, and numerous SDOT-related issues. It is through this lens that we are viewing the draft STP and providing the following comments and suggestions:

## **SUMMARY:**

As this is a lengthy document, we have prepared a summary of our feedback here.

Overall we are impressed with the scope and ambition laid out in the STP. The document is thorough in its coverage as is the amount of work and data compiled. The document shows that SDOT is aware that Seattle desires radical, transformational change and a vastly expanded transit system. The goals laid out in the STP are bold and admirable, and by and large, the TAB is in line with most of them. These goals show that transit truly is an issue of equity from a climate and safety lens, as well as simply when considering a fundamental right to movement.

Much of our concerns lie in the specifics and implementation. As far as the TAB is concerned, the stakes could not be higher. With transit projects ballooning in cost and timeline, every decision and implementation detail will have immense impact for many years in the future. With

Seattle anticipating a hefty increase in population in the coming decades, we need to begin prepping for an expanded, robust transit system now. To meet our climate and safety goals and ensure that metrics for both don't trend in the wrong direction with the incoming increase in population, we need to act now.

That is why the TAB has some concern into how these important and necessary goals will be concretely implemented and achieved. For one, the STP is an incredibly comprehensive and sprawling document. It has sections on transit, freight, vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, etc. However, the TAB believes that the STP does not comment enough on how priorities for different modes of transportation will be managed when conflicts arise. Namely, will we maintain our stated commitment to safety and transit development if it leads to slower freight delivery teams or increased single-occupancy vehicle congestion? Without specific consideration into how conflicting priorities will be managed, it is the TAB's concern that as has been the case in the past, the more car-oriented priorities will make themselves known.

Another place of concern is in the specifics of how SDOT implements specific projects. In short, transit projects take a long time to implement. The TAB believes that Seattle will not be able to achieve its goals stated in the STP if all the projects that it plans will continue to be subject to the same amount of process. Having a process is of course necessary due to the immense complexity and amount of moving parts in these projects, but we encourage SDOT to lay out how it plans to adjust its process to ensure it can do its due diligence while not delaying much-needed transit improvements. We can see this sort of speedy delivery in the various spot improvements and believe a similar mindset should be implemented with larger projects as well.

Finally, our concern is that the STP does not have enough specific examples of projects and measurables where it will bring these goals into reality. We applaud the "Measurable Outcomes" and "Transit Performance Measurables" sections for providing these specifics but would like to see more examples of both as well as future projects SDOT plans to prioritize. The more specific projects laid out and explicitly endorsed by SDOT with its expertise, the more real this plan becomes. What the TAB wants to avoid more than anything else is for a document with this much work put into it to become another document that is ignored and eventually forgotten. The STP and Seattle deserve better and we are excited to see the final result.

## **OVERVIEW:**

The TAB may not be able to predict everything that will happen in the next 20 years, but we are in full agreement with the following statement mentioned on T-1: “Transit will be one of the best tools for advancing, equity, mobility, and sustainability.” We appreciate this introduction and believe that it will serve us well into the future. The depth and breadth of transit services offered just in the Seattle area cannot be overstated: buses, streetcars, monorail, commuter and light rail, ferries, water taxis, paratransit, vanpool, on-demand shuttles, and ridesharing services.

The TAB is also mindful that Seattle has changed after 2020, and we must view decisions for our future through an equity framework, and always consider our decisions and their impacts on racial and social justice needs. Accessibility for all riders and passengers is equally important, and as the Frequent Transit Network (FTN) framework takes shape, we will also use it in guiding our decision-making on transit-related issues.

The STP and the related Elements sections for all transportation modes all share the following goals:

### **Safety, Equity, Sustainability, Mobility, Livability, and Maintenance & Modernization**

The STP devotes 8 pages to detailing these goals and their relationship to Transit. We won't comment on every Key Move, but will highlight a few in each section:

#### **Safety: Prioritize safety for travelers in Seattle, with no serious injury or fatal crashes**

- S1 – Reduce vehicle speeds to increase safety
- S2 – Concentrate safety investments at the most collision-prone locations
- S3 – Make all journeys safer, from departure to destination.
- S4 – Provide safer routes to schools, parks, transit, community gathering spaces, and other common destinations

Regarding S3, for transit ridership to increase to meet the targets being proposed for the next decades, it is essential that riders feel safe and will choose public transit over a single-

occupancy vehicle. Metro and Sound Transit are working to make public transit a safe space for all, and the TAB fully supports the planning and expense needed to complete this effort. The TAB looks forward to future presentations on how Metro and Sound Transit will implement these plans.

**Equity: Co-create with community and implement restorative practices to address transportation-related inequities**

- TJ1 – Center the voices of communities of color and underrepresented groups in planning and decision-making processes.
- TJ2 – Address inequities in the transportation system by prioritizing investments for impacted communities.
- TJ3 – Remove cost as a barrier so everyone can take the trips they need to make.

Regarding TJ2, this mandate for all City of Seattle projects is clearly defined and expected to be used now and into the future. For transit-related issues, we have enough data and maps to show where these areas were, are, and are projected to be, so that creating equitable and sustainable routes and service hours can be planned for now, and bring everyone to the table to make this a successful process.

Regarding TJ3, the TAB supports efforts to remove cost as a barrier, as an example, we fully support the inroads made in youth ORCA Cards throughout the region, and locally, as the STM annual reports show, their Transportation Access Program (TAP) uses ORCA Cards for underserved small groups, and has achieved great results and made a difference in the participants lives. Over the next decades, the TAB welcomes the opportunity to assist SDOT and local transit agencies on implementing TJ3.

**Sustainability: Respond to climate change through innovation and a lens of climate justice**

- CA1 – Improve neighborhood air quality and health outcomes by promoting clean, sustainable travel options

- CA2 – Green city streets with landscaping and street trees to better handle changing climate
- CA3 – Foster neighborhood vitality and improved community health
- CA4 – Support the transition from fossil fuels to electric vehicles for personal, commercial, and delivery trips.
- CA5 – Advance mobility management strategies to encourage walking, biking, and transit trips

These goals are laudable, but fall short of the transformative change needed in Seattle transportation system to adapt to a new future of climate change. Encouraging sustainable travel needs transformative changes like bus-only lanes to decrease transit times, reduced car miles, and more travel options. This is a two-fold process; both increase of alternatives to cars are needed as well as decrease of car access, to actively support a shift in movement around the city. According to SDOT's data, 60% of Seattle emissions are due to transportation, and of that 60%, almost 90% is due to specifically passenger cars, not buses or trucks. Cars in Seattle are the single largest driver of CO2 emissions, and this plan needs to actively seek to reduce that number. This key move and its goals fall short of actually seeking to reduce the number of cars on the road, and therefore is not created with the reality of a climate-ready Seattle.

The TAB supports the mandates to zero-emission vehicles in all facets of fleet operations, but we also must make sure that our prioritization includes focusing on frequency, by increasing the choices that users of single occupancy vehicles have to move to riding transit buses, streetcars, monorail, link light rail, trains, Metro Flex, and reduce the emissions those SOV produce. We believe that a focus on reducing car trips and increasing transit trips, is a more important investment than electrifying what is already a low to no-emission fleet of transit vehicles.

**Mobility: Provide reliable and affordable travel options that help people and goods get where they need to go**

- PG1 – Create seamless travel connections
- PG2 – Make walking, biking, and rolling easy and enjoyable travel choices
- PG3 – Create world-class access to transit and make service more frequent and reliable.

- PG4 – Enhance economic vitality by supporting freight movement and growth in deliveries.
- PG5 – Manage curb space to reflect city goals and priorities.

If the TAB could only choose one Key Move from the voluminous list, PG3 would be the one. The 2016 METRO CONNECTS report, already noted that “Frequency” was the number one request of transit riders, and this still holds true in 2023. You will not have passengers leave their single-occupancy vehicles for a transit option that is slower, unreliable, expensive, and unsafe. Transit routes using RapidRide buses and Sound Transit’s Link Light Rail system offer riders a “frequent” arriving system now, but the TAB would like to see improvement in this area. We know that Link Light Rail service ends around 12:30 AM, and the Night Routes (including RapidRide routes) that transit buses use are limited in service areas and run times. If a goal of the STP is to decrease car trips and single occupancy vehicles on the streets in the late night, early AM hours, the TAB supports extending both Link Light Rail and transit bus services (especially RapidRide bus service) during those hours, and the use of STM funds to accomplish that goal.

The TAB would ask for more study and consideration be given to Transit Element Action T56 – Create a continuous streetcar connection by linking the First Hill and South Lake Union streetcar lines through Downtown. The TAB supports providing more transit options to users in the Downtown Corridor, and reducing the use of single occupancy vehicles on our Downtown streets, and reducing car trips in those areas. But, as projects are prioritized, the TAB continues to work with SDOT and local transit agencies to make sure that funding is used for transit projects equally to maximize the number of trips and people served by transit, whether that is by streetcar or other modes of transit.

For PG4, the TAB fully supports the pilot project testing of sharing dedicated bus and freight lanes in heavily used traffic areas. There will always be limited areas of deliveries at curbside, and we await the results of the pilot test to see if this is viable or not. The TAB will also focus on ensuring that the safety and mobility of transit, bike users, and pedestrians is not impacted by any FAB future lanes. In addition, the TAB hopes to work with the Freight Advisory Board on supporting the reduction of car trips, with the benefit of creating efficient freight movement and growth in the future.



The TAB is concerned, however, with the emphasis given here to supporting "freight movement." Paramount in all freight investment decisions must be safety and environmental impacts. We believe that if the STP is a document that is aimed at transforming our transportation system for the purposes of increased safety, decreased emissions, and equitable access to movement, that we shift the paradigm away from prioritizing freight and focus more on the safety of the more vulnerable people on our streets. These goals are, of course, stated elsewhere in the STP. But it is our concern that having both "freight movement" and safety and reduced climate emissions as aspirations presents a contradiction that has historically been resolved in favor of the status quo of more dangerous and less equitable street design. The current proposal in front of the Seattle City Council to have any modifications to trucking routes be looked over by the Freight Advisory Board (that has already been commented on by the Pedestrian Advisory Board) serves as a perfect example. Freight, of course, has a vital role to play, but we would ask that if SDOT wants to keep all of these goals moving forward, that sections be added to the STP that explicitly explain how SDOT will manage all of these goals, and how prioritization will be made should some of these goals contradict themselves in specific situations.

Regarding PG5, the TAB knows that public transit will also need to use curb space for its mode of transportation, but we also support T65 and transit policies interacting with the Bicycle modal board, and all current and future modes of transportation that may need curb-side space.

**Livability: Reimagine city streets as inviting places to linger and play**

- PP1 – Boldly reallocate street space to prioritize people while preserving access for goods delivery and emergency response
- PP2 – Transform community and mobility hubs into welcome places.
- PP3 – Co-create and enhance public spaces for playing and gathering to improve community health
- PP4 – Activate and maintain public spaces to create a welcoming and age-friendly public realm

In regards to PP1, the TAB supports any pilot or permanent project to make the Pike Place Market area in Downtown Seattle car-free. The pedestrianization of Pike Place Market is critical to the success of our future public works investments in the Center City Streetcar Connector

with Pike Place being one of the largest trip generators for tourists coming to Seattle and likely the busiest stop on this future streetcar alignment downtown. Making these street and pedestrian improvements now, before we lay track and invest millions on this new streetcar connector will lay the groundwork for better station area access and a better transit-pedestrian experience at one of our largest tourist attractions as well as support our focus on reducing single occupancy vehicle trips.

Regarding PP2, transit riders want a safe and vibrant space when waiting for public transit, and as demonstrated by the areas near Link Light Rail stations, offering added amenities in areas by public transit stops makes this happen. In addition, to achieve our Vision Zero goals, being able to safely get to public transit areas will be essential and lifesaving. The TAB hopes to partner with SDOT, transit agencies, and other modal boards in making this vision a reality.

### **Maintenance & Modernization: Improve city transportation infrastructure and ready it for the future**

- MM1 – Transform city streets for safety and sustainable travel choices through optimal timing of asset maintenance and replacement
- MM2 – Reduce neighborhood disparities in the quality of streets, sidewalks, public spaces, and bridges.
- MM3 – Ready city streets for new travel options and emerging trends and technologies

Regarding MM2, this situation has not just happened in Seattle, it has existed for generations, and if events in the past few years have started the “spark of change”, the TAB fully supports this effort to reverse the past inequities and move forward to fix things. We believe that transit ridership will grow in the future, and while we, the TAB, can help fund more transit trips through the STM, we need SDOT and others to add and maintain the sidewalks, streets, crosswalks, public spaces, and bridges that riders use to get them to a bus stop, Link Light Rail station, curbside pickup, and the like.

But, the TAB will cite an example of how curbside pickup can be improved. The placement of curbside pickup spaces next to existing bus lanes, in the Lower Queen Anne area, causes transit access to be delayed as vehicles using the curbside pickup spaces are parked there, blocking the bus lane. Without any enforcement for keeping transit lanes clear, route schedules, rider experiences and frequency of service are all impacted.

There are some key points made on pages T-14 and T-15 that we would like to recap below:

### **OPPORTUNITIES AND EMERGING TRENDS**

- Climate Action
- Equitable Access to Travel Option Including New Shared Mobility
- Link Light Rail expansion
- RapidRide system expansion
- Changing travel patterns and customer needs
- Transit electrification

TAB Comments: The TAB fully supports the City of Seattle mandate for zero-emission vehicles in the next decade and looks forward to the future designs of streetcars and transit buses, if replacements are needed. We are fully briefed by Sound and Metro Transit on the future of Link Light Rail and RapidRide, but understand that transportation projects do require time for planning, community engagement, EIS, funding, and of course, the actual construction. The TAB is following the planning and development of the WSBLE Link Light Rail project and its revisions, and will issue its recommendations when needed, and we know several RapidRide projects will be launched in the near future, and we look forward to the future routes being proposed.

While the TAB supports Climate Action, we believe that a reading of the City of Seattle's own reports show that cars, not transit vehicles, are the biggest contributor to CO2 emissions in the city (around 60%), and strongly urge the City of Seattle to support our focus on decreasing car trips, and increasing all forms of transit service, at all hours, to provide a frequent service, and equitable access, to all. While electrifying the bus fleet is an admirable goal, as cars contribute much more to Seattle's emissions, we believe the more environmentally responsible solution is focusing funds on strengthening and improving our bus network. We would like future reports to not combine cars and transit under the "transportation" heading, without listing details on what percentages each contributes to the total.

A large concern of the TAB is how effective and efficient the use of “community engagement” is in planning transit projects. We support the rights of everyone to have a voice in community projects, but would like to see a more efficient and timely process created in the future. However, for Seattle to meet its transit, climate, and safety goals, it must be able to rapidly roll out transit infrastructure when needed. For example, when the West Seattle bridge went out, it was rightfully treated as an emergency and repairs were put in. We ask for a similar level of urgency to be applied to lagging areas of the transit network such as the Route 8 and ST3. While community input is of course valued, SDOT does take many actions without community input as is its purview. The TAB encourages that certain transit implementations such as with bus lanes be implemented in such a speedy fashion as often the primary "sin" in these projects' design is a measure of inconvenience they introduce for motorists. For example, the creation of one RapidRide bus line is not efficient, and is measured in years and decades for completion; adding a bus lane on a Seattle street is also measured in years instead of months. These delays are not one-time events, but a continuous event on each new RapidRide or bus lane project, and the TAB will work with SDOT on understanding how decisions are made and “roadblocks” are preventing the timely implementation of transit projects.

## **CHALLENGES**

- Ridership loss due to COVID-19 pandemic
- Change in office work and impacts on City Center ridership/service
- Customer safety and security
- Rising housing and transportation costs
- Rise in serious and fatal collisions on Seattle’s streets
- COVID-19 pandemic-related labor shortages and supply chain disruptions

TAB Comments: Although we are mandated to use the majority of our STM funding on bus-related services and needs, there are also reality-based situations that impede this, such as ridership changes, bus driver shortages, and parts supply issues (buses out of service), so we appreciate the STM staff updating us on what is actually occurring. Where riders can afford to live, how safe they feel getting to a transit stop and onboard a transit vehicle, as well as how they work (in person or virtually), have impacted the ridership on all transit vehicles for all transit

agencies, and the TAB accepts this as the “new normal” and believes that future planning for financing, ridership, routes, drivers, maintenance, etc..., needs to be based on revised information, not ones from before March 2020. The Vision Zero plan has not been released yet, but the TAB looks forward to supporting any ways that transit can assist in achieving its goals.

SDOT and the TAB – pages T-21 and T-22 illustrate how much SDOT is involved in not just current planning, but also future planning for transit needs in Seattle. The general public may not be aware of the many facets of their responsibilities, but the TAB is fortunate to receive updates during its monthly meetings from various SDOT staff on their ongoing projects.

We will restate the list of roles that SDOT is responsible for:

- Capital Project Funding
- Capital Project Development
- Funding and Planning Service (STM)
- Improving Transit Access (STM)
- Transit System Connectivity and Integration
- Transit Reliability (HCT – high capacity transit facilities)
- Station Area Planning and Permitting (OPCD - Seattle Office of Planning and Community)
- Development and SDCI – (Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections)
- Traveler Experience in the Digital Realm
- Regional Transit Coordination (King County Metro, Sound Transit, other neighboring agencies)
- Seattle Streetcar

TAB Comment: The TAB’s connection with SDOT is through our SDOT liaison, a staff person who helps counsel the TAB group, meets with its co-chairs to plan agendas, attends the monthly meetings, tracks attendance, and is essential to our operation. In addition to this duty,

the liaison is a full-time SDOT employee with responsibilities of his/her own. The TAB thanks SDOT for providing our liaison and assisting us in understanding all of the duties and responsibilities, listed above, that SDOT provides for transit.

### **The TAB support of the Frequent Transit Network (FTN)**

Moving into the future, riders will benefit from the work being done on the FTN, which has existed since its creation in the 2016 Transit Master Plan (TMP), but has been revised significantly to reflect the current realities of what riders want and what transit can provide.

As mentioned earlier in our response, the TAB noted that back in 2016, the original METRO CONNECTS plan knew that “frequency” was essential in future transit planning, and it still is in 2023 and beyond. What is new for the updated FTN is creating Transit Corridors into three categories:

- Frequent: Better than 10 minutes – 6-10 minute service from 6AM-7PM on weekdays, and 10-15 minute service through to midnight every day. Use for RapidRide routes and other very high-frequency routes.
- Frequent 10 minutes: 10-minute service from 6Am-7PM and 15-minute service through to midnight every day. Used for main transit and RapidRide corridors.
- Frequent 15 minutes: 15-minute service from 6Am-9PM, with 30-minute service through to midnight every day. Aligns with parking flexibility areas near new housing developments and frequent transit service.

The TAB supports the T-24 figure for the FTN Frequency Targets. It is very important that bus routes, especially the RapidRide routes, operate every 10 to 15 minutes between 7pm and 12am. Currently, most RapidRide routes do not operate at 10 to 15 minute frequency between 9pm and 12am. Even the new RapidRide G Line is projected to have a frequency range of 15 minutes to 40 minutes from 10pm to 5am. That range is too long and not acceptable for a RapidRide route. RapidRide buses should operate at 10 to 15 minute frequencies from 7pm to midnight. Between midnight and 5am, 25 to 30 minute frequency seems reasonable. 40 minutes is not frequent and not reliable for RapidRide routes at any time of the day or night.

		Frequency (minutes)*				Span of Service
		Peak	Midday	Evening	Night	
<b>New</b>	Weekday	6	6	15	15-40	5:00a.m. - 4:00a.m.
<b>RapidRide</b>	Saturday	6	6	15	15-40	5:00a.m. - 4:00a.m.
<b>G Line</b>	Sunday	15	15	15	15-40	5:00a.m. - 4:00a.m.

\*Peak 6-9 a.m. /3-7 p.m., Midday: 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., Evening: 7-10 p.m., Night: 10 p.m. - 5 a.m.

(RapidRide G Line Frequency Table above)

According to the T-26 figure for the FTN Targets, there are some RapidRide routes that are in the yellow category, which is a frequency of 10 minutes. However, all RapidRide routes should be in the green category, which is a frequency of better than 10 minutes. For example, the RapidRide H Line travels along Delridge Way SW and that road is in the yellow category. Delridge Way SW should be in the green category and frequency should be better than 10 minutes for the majority of the day. The TAB believes that all RapidRide routes and corridors should be in the most frequent category all day long.

Figure 4: Frequent Transit Network Targets



Along with these new categories, a network of transit corridors will exist to connect urban villages and centers, and Link Light Rail stations. The criteria for these corridors are based on the following:

- Existing and future transit demand
- Future population and employment density
- Equity priority areas (areas with greater concentrations of BIPOC, low-income, foreign-born, disabled, or who have limited English proficiency)
- Access to link stations for regional connectivity
- Locations where a higher percent of passengers pay with reduced fares

The report notes, and the TAB would ask for updates on, the need for the FTN to work on known service deficiencies on weekends and mid-day service versus the peak-period times when frequencies are highest. We understand that corrections may be needed to efficiently run an all day, seven day a week service, and the TAB and the STM can assist on the financial portion of this, as funding is needed.

Speaking of the STM, as we noted at the beginning of this document, one of the most important TAB mandates is to fund additional transit service and capital investments to improve transit service and access to transit. The FTN and STM, and on an oversight basis, the TAB all work together, to ensure the success of this equity-centered prioritization methodology, for assigning these service investments.

Since the TAB consulted with SDOT in creating the methodology used, we will be actively involved in any future changes to it, and we welcome these future opportunities. Page T-27 gives the details of what is incorporated into this methodology.

The future of transit in Seattle is already occurring, with known transit corridors located throughout the region, and connecting riders with RapidRide buses, Transit-Plus Multimodal Corridors, and Sound Transit Link Light Rail plans, either being implemented now or being designed for the future.

The Transit Corridor Planning section (pages T-28 to T-30) are separated into SDOT Major Projects (large scale projects managed by SDOT, like the RapidRide E line), SDOT Transit



Corridor Programs (improve travel time and reliability, passenger facilities, safety, and multimodal access), and Partner led projects (projects where King County METRO is leading project development or plans to design and fund the project, SDOT is a key partner for these projects).

The TAB notes the future RapidRide proposed projects listed on page T-29 and supports the funding of these projects, as they will continue to increase the frequency of service available to riders, but we also know that priorities in funding may occur and we look forward to future presentations on this topic.

Priority Transit Corridors – as consideration is made for capital investments on transit projects, these corridors are tiered according to the following classifications:

- Tier 1: Premium Transit Corridor – highest-level arterial transit need, continuous transit priority, potential future light rail corridor
- Tier 2: High-Priority Bus Corridor – Merits corridor-level investment programming, significant transit priority need
- Tier 3: Priority Bus Corridor – incremental or spot-location transit priority as per Transit Performance Policy

The table on T-30 and map on T-31 visually illustrate the words listed above, and red color-coded corridors correspond to current and future RapidRide corridors, which the TAB supports, and expects they can be funded in full.

### **Center City Connections**

The top of T-32 describes this: “Transit is crucial to the economic success of Downtown, delivering people and moving residents, workers, and visitors within the area.”

What are the goals for this idea in the next two decades?

- Dramatically improved transit access to and within Downtown
- Opportunity to rethink street use and bus pathways
- Economic development and activation

- Right-of-way (ROW) allocation and bus layover management

The TAB agrees that a thriving Downtown Seattle is important to any transit planning now and into the future, and based on the current STM annual reports, the draft STP, and the upcoming Vision Zero and Comprehensive Plans, we believe that a well-thought out, sustainable, and fundable plan will be supported by voters, and the TAB. In regards to the above listed goals, without a reduction of single occupancy vehicle usage in Downtown Seattle, and the related reduction in car trips, the successful implementation of these goals may not be achieved.

### **Seattle Streetcar and Culture Connector**

TAB is supportive of the Center City Connector/Cultural connector as joining our two currently disconnected streetcar lines will help the system reach its true ridership potential.

Concerning Figure 6: Center City Transit Capital Projects shows a future streetcar corridor along 1st avenue connecting Downtown Seattle to Seattle Center at Climate Pledge Arena which duplicates the current Monorail alignment a mere 4 blocks to the east. In the interest of fiscal responsibility, it would seem prudent to avoid spending municipal tax dollars in the study of a future streetcar corridor which would duplicate the existing Monorail route so nearby. TAB supports further revitalization of the current Monorail infrastructure as the most viable Downtown Seattle - Seattle Center connection. For example, past study and proposals have called for a Monorail Belltown infill station at Amazon HQ (Spheres) and an extension from the current terminus at Space Needle across Seattle Center to the new Climate Pledge Arena.

While the TAB is supportive of all transit projects that will decrease car trips and increase transit ridership in the Downtown Seattle area, we hope to learn more about the future planning of the Culture Connector (formerly known as Center City Connector or C3), and will await further updates on funding, costs, ridership, and streetcar purchases, to help prioritize this against other known transit projects.

The TAB notes the section entitled “Streetcar State of Good Repair” on page T-35. As funding is not part of this draft STP, we would look for future updates as to the current condition of the SDOT owned streetcars, their life cycle, and cost of future purchases (replacement of current streetcars and any new models for the TCC). We would like to see a comparison of continuing with this current system or making use of new EV or zero-emission technology in its place. In

terms of achieving a Vision Zero result, it needs to be noted on how many transit accidents have involved streetcars and what can be done to prevent future incidents.

### **King County Metro and Sound Transit Capital Programs**

**Light Rail Expansion** The TAB understands that the funding portion of the STP is not part of this draft plan, but it also cannot comment on the costs associated with Capital Programs/Projects or Light Rail Expansion, currently or looking forward 20 years, until this financial information is publicly presented at a later date. In general, Tables 3 & 4, and Figures 7 & 8 (pages T-38 to T-41) are a great start at future projects for light rail expansion, light rail stations, RapidRide corridors, and Sounder commuter rail expansion, and we look forward to comment on them when the actual funding is proposed.

Looking at Figures 7 & 8, a concern is that LRT has already been selected as the assumed higher capacity mode for future corridors. It is important that we consider all options and transit modes for higher order projects as this determines future capacity, frequency and cost. A consideration must be our current operator shortage which has not been a problem for driverless metro rail such as the automated Skytrain system in Vancouver. Similarly, systems such as the Portland Aerial Tram & Mexico City Cablebús provide similar transit solutions for higher capacity corridors using other technologies and rolling stock while lowering operational costs, especially concerning labor. Keeping our options open to other transport technologies is crucial for finding the right tool for the job. While LRT can be quite versatile, it does have its limitations especially concerning capacity and frequency when not fully grade separated or operating its own right of way. Further, the cost benefit of LRT diminishes when substantial portions of the system are placed underground as we have seen in Link LRT expansion thus far. As LRT in our region expands outside of Seattle & King County proper, it turns into suburban and commuter rail while also performing some of the functions of a subway inside the urban core of Seattle. LRT expansion projects have increasingly become more expensive and difficult to complete within our current ST3 mandate for which most projects have faced significant cost overruns and delays. This hybrid nature of LRT can be both a benefit and a detriment and worth further consideration as the preferred higher order transit mode for our city.

## **Community and Mobility Hubs Network**

An illustration on page T-42, Figure 9 – Key Features and Function of Seattle Community and Mobility Hubs explains the network very well, and is recapped below:

- Passenger Environment – Safety, Protected Environment, First & last mile trip choice, Sustainability through grouped trips
- Convenience – Easy transfer, Frequent connection, Clean and well-maintained facilities
- Information – Wayfinding, Service information
- Multimodal Connections – Pedestrian space and comfort, Access to Bike Network, Shared mobility storage
- Place & Public Space – Welcoming for all, Plazas, activation, & multi-use spaces, Sense of place

As for the locations of the Community and Mobility Hubs, Table 5 on page T-43 explains it as follows:

### Group A: Major Regional Hubs

- Major intermodal transfers between frequent bus, rail, ferry, or other major transit services
- Highest investment level

### Group B: Link Station Hubs

- Link Stations with RapidRide or frequent services
- High investment level

### Group C: Frequent Connections Hubs

- RapidRide or frequent route with another RapidRide or frequent route
- Medium to High investment

### Group D: Local Access Hubs

- RapidRide or frequent route in urban village or neighborhood anchor
- Medium investment

The TAB cannot comment on the viability of these hubs until the financial portion of the STP is shared. If prioritization of funding needs to occur, it is assumed that Group A would be funded first, and the others in descending order of priority. As this is a long-range plan, we will await updates on all parts of the Community and Mobility Hubs.

Throughout the year, SDOT makes presentations to the TAB on a variety of topics, so we have some knowledge of what is discussed in the draft STP on pages T-45 to T-50.

### **Transit Spot Improvements**

With funding from the STM, which the TAB has financial oversight over, these small and mid-scale capital projects include: creating bus-only lanes, traffic signal upgrades, roadway improvements, and bus stop modifications. The TAB fully supports the financial resources needed by the team running the Transit Spot Improvements program, and looks forward to their continued quick and cost-effective solutions to any small and mid-scale transit project.

Currently, the process of creating bus-only lanes and making smaller transit spot improvements takes longer than it should. As we stated before, TAB believes we can streamline and expedite the public input, review, and SEPA processes so that new bus lanes can be built in months, rather than years or decades while still affording an opportunity for meaningful community input. It should not take a year and half to add bus lanes to a 4 lane road. SDOT and the City of Seattle should take a One-Size-Fits-All approach to add 24/7 bus lanes on any 4 lane or wider road with bus routes, especially for routes with RapidRide lines. A few road examples include Mercer St in Uptown and Denny Way in South Lake Union. The TAB supports a new vision for Seattle where we can see new bus lanes being added around the city at a much faster rate than they currently are. Cutting the project time in half and not doing laborious outreach and studies would cut the price of bus lane projects and transit spot improvements.

## **Bus Layover Coordination**

While most people ride buses and other transit vehicles into the Downtown corridor, they may not consider where the vehicle needs to wait until needed for its next run. SDOT works with METRO Transit on its layover planning, since curbside spaces are limited, but if transit runs continue to increase, the planning is starting now to find solutions. This is an often overlooked item in transit planning for the future, and the TAB will ask for presentations as needed to track the progress being made.

It is worth noting that page T-48 mentions the need for EV charging facilities as more zero-emission vehicles are acquired, and it's possible that the fleet mix of standard and articulated transit buses may change. As we've mentioned earlier, the financial impacts of these decisions are of interest to the TAB.

## **Freight and Bus (FAB) Lanes**

A pilot project to test the viability of sharing bus and freight traffic in curbside lanes has been proposed, and the TAB hopes to work with the Freight modal board on following up jointly on this topic and project. There is a finite amount of key corridors that can be used and repurposed, so it is essential to create real-world plans for the future, and ensure success before moving forward. If the pilot project proves successful, the TAB hopes that funding can be allocated to fully implement this project.

## **Innovative Transit Streets**

The People Streets and Public Space element of the STP fully explains this idea, but in general, Table 6 – Innovative Transit Streets on page T-49 summarizes the details.

- Downtown Transit and Destination Streets: Create street space, move high volumes of people, maintain or reduce transit travel times, support street life and retail, address critical building access needs
- Transit on People Streets: Support street life and retail, prioritize transit, move high volumes of people
- Freight and Bus Shared Lanes: Provide priority for multiple modes, resolve operational conflicts, widely space transit stops, create parallel bike facilities

- Bus and Bike Shared Lanes: Provide priority for multiple modes, need compatible speeds and appropriate grades (not uphill)
- Transit priority on Destination Streets: Streets are socialization spaces, high pedestrian traffic, retail with frequent transit
- Streets with Surface Rail and Bus: Share street space when bus corridors and rail overlap, reduce private vehicle priority, credit high quality pedestrian and waiting environments
- Center Running Transit Ways: High ridership corridors, transit needs priority, narrow streets with reduced pedestrian crossing distances, removal of unprotected left turns
- Transit Priority on One-Way Streets: Moves large volumes of transit customers; One way streets improve transit reliability; Accommodations for loading, parking, and bicycle facilities

The TAB supports the funding and implementation of the Innovative Transit Streets Program, and looks forward to their installation and success. As has been previously mentioned, there is an opportunity for the Pike Place Market area to be a car-free destination street, and the TAB supports the implementation of this idea. If the opportunities arise for the TAB to work with the Freight and Bike modal boards on their portions of the planning process, we welcome the opportunity.

The TAB supports contraflow transit lanes, which are used on one-way streets that have transit run both directions, and non-transit vehicles are prohibited, with the benefit being better connectivity and shorter wait times. Also, the idea of shared lanes for freight and biking is long overdue and we believe that sharing transit priority lanes with others is a win-win for all.

### **Access to Transit**

The TAB believes that there should be no barriers to riding public transit, and while a “free” transit service policy may not be possible, there are opportunities, like the statewide Youth fare-free program, and the various Transportation Access Programs that have used STM funding to assist underserved populations with pre-paid ORCA cards and assist with their daily living activities, ranging from work situations in the CID to residents in our Seattle Housing Authority living facilities, and assisting South Seattle residents access public transit.

While the TAB recognizes that not everyone has access to smartphone technology, for those who do, fare paying is at their fingertips with the use of an app, with a program called Transit GO. ORCA cards (Next Generation) are also being upgraded for the future, and we await its rollout.

But, with different transit agencies in the region, finding one universal fare policy has not been accomplished yet, and the TAB encourages the planning for a region-free fare structure to create standardization, equity, and remove another barrier to understanding transit riding in the region. The STP mentions the effort to create a universal or guaranteed basic mobility for all, and the TAB agrees that continuing to have barriers to mobility in 2023 is unacceptable, and riders deserve an equitable solution, regardless of where they live or how much they earn. To that end, the STP also mentions “mobility wallets” which would be payment services either at a discount or subsidized to promote ridership in all populations equally and fairly. Given that other cities in the USA (Boise, Los Angeles, Oakland, Pittsburgh, and Portland) have already successfully implemented this system, the TAB strongly encourages Seattle and other transit regions to join them.

While many of us think of a bus ride as just that, the STP is correct in defining the “Rider Experience” as something that begins when the rider decides to ride a transit vehicle, and concludes when they reach their destination. Fortunately there are app-based and text-based ways to find out when your transit vehicle is arriving and where a boarding area is, but it is also important that a rider feels safe while riding and is seated in a clean and comfortable area. Since time is valuable for all, the oft-used term in our response, “frequency”, is very relevant and can make or break a decision to ride transit or use a single occupancy vehicle.

### **Alternative Service Modes**

While most people know that buses, vanpools, trains, light rail, streetcars, monorail, exist to help them get to their destination, a newer on-call service may not be as well known – Metro Flex (formerly called Via to Transit), uses on-demand van service to four Link Light Rail Stations in Southeast Seattle, and one station outside of Seattle, to assist riders on getting to destinations within these service areas.

Another service that runs on a seasonal basis is called “Trailhead Direct” that assists riders in getting access to outdoor recreation areas along the I-90 corridor. Running from May until Labor



Day, the results since 2017 continue through 2023, and are evaluated annually, which have been successful so far.

These two alternative service modes are in the testing phase, but any ideas implemented towards moving riders from cars to transit is supported by the TAB, and the price savings for the riders also need to be taken into consideration, as well as how many repeat users are using the service. From presentations at TAB meetings, we know that the actual cost for one rider is high, when you add in any subsidies, driver costs, maintenance and fuel charges, but increased ridership will help generate lower costs per trip.

### **Transit Technology and Systems**

Pages T-55 and T-56 of the draft STP lists numerous technology tools and systems that our transit services use on the back-end to run a transit system efficiently and effectively. As has been mentioned earlier, funding amounts are not part of the draft plan, but the TAB understands and supports that the future planning of transit cannot be implemented if the back-end services are not kept upgraded to support rider expectations.

### **Fleet Electrification**

With a target year of 2035 to complete a zero-emissions transit fleet, King County METRO is moving ahead with adding battery-operated (EV) buses to its electric powered trolleybus fleet, and continuing to operate its diesel hybrid-electric buses. Aside from EV technology, testing vehicles powered by natural gas, hydrogen, biodiesel, and propane, along with other low to no-emission fuels are continuing.

The TAB understands the METRO transit mandate it operates under, but will continue to state that even with the total electrification of its fleet, CO2 emissions will continue to be produced by single occupancy vehicles, and we need to focus on moving drivers out of those vehicles to become riders of public transportation, and continue to support and fund having a frequent transit system that runs when riders need it, in areas where they live, and at an affordable cost.

## **Transit Asset Maintenance**

The section of the draft STP is informative in that it covers items that are often not thought about when riding a transit vehicle. The assets under management by SDOT include facilities and amenities to run transit networks, including shelters, wayfinding (signage), real-time information signs, and even sidewalks.

The term “state of good repair” is used to describe what is needed to keep transit operating smoothly and without interruption. To that end, SDOT issues regular reports on transit readiness and transit asset management (including the Seattle Streetcar and King Street Station) to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). This plan is called a Transit Asset Management Plan (TAMP), but it is also noteworthy as the draft STP highlights, that bridges and structures, arterial roadway pavement, pavement markings, and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) are not part of the TAMP, even though the failure of any one of these can halt transit services on the network.

Data collection is essential to monitoring the health of the transit network, and SDOT monitors such things as paving conditions, maintenance issues and safety hazards, whether or not they are SDOT-owned.

We agree that transit is a “critical travel option if roads, bridges, or other facilities are closed for needed maintenance or repair.” The TAB appreciates its ongoing relationship with SDOT in the planning and implementation of transit related programs and services in Seattle, and looks forward to what the future holds.

## **Measurable Outcomes**

SDOT uses various outcomes to measure the success of the STP Transit Element. Based on a tiered system, SDOT has created the following three tiers for success:

- Tier 1 – overarching, and sometimes aspirational, outcome-based measures are identified in the STP implementation strategy (reduction in vehicle miles traveled, percent of household income dedicated to transportation)
- Tier 2 – these measures are tracked in individual elements (increasing share of trips made by people taking transit and improving the reliability of transit service)

- Tier 3 – measure in the Tier 3 category are typically tracked by individual programs (miles of bus spot improvements, miles of dedicated transit-only or freight and bus lanes installed)

The TAB has some concerns with the three tiers for success methodology. For Tier 1, we would like to see what performance measures SDOT is aiming for, such as specifically stating a reduction in vehicle miles traveled (VMT). Or, moving this measure from Tier 1 and moving it to Tier 2, along with removing the word “aspirational” from Tier 1, and focus on explicit goals, in order to actually reach our planned climate and safety goals. While reducing the VMT is stated specifically in other Elements, we’d like to see it stated that way in this Element.

**Table 7 – Transit Performance Measures**

- Increase trips made by people taking transit
- Increase access to frequent transit
- Increase satisfaction waiting at bus stops during the day and at night
- Improve reliability of transit routes
- Reduce cost barriers to transit
- Support a well-maintained transit network

Page T-58 describes how SDOT defines “success” with its Seattle Transportation Plan.

The Seattle Transit Advisory Board has similar views for transit services in Seattle, and we measure success with some of the following metrics:

- Frequency – a transit service that does not meet the riders time schedule cannot be successful
- Safety – the transit experience, whether walking on a sidewalk, waiting at a clean bus stop or well-lit shelter, crossing an intersection, sitting or standing on a transit vehicle, departing at the destination bus stop, shelter, or station, need to present a safe, clean, friendly experience for all riders/passengers, or they are unlikely to make a repeat journey.

- Finance – the TAB is mandated to provide oversight for STM expenditures and report annually to the City of Seattle on its findings. In addition to that, the TAB believes in good fiscal management for transit service expenditures, and will monitor future purchases of streetcars and/or transit vehicles that fall under the “state of good repair” portion of the STP. The TAB does not offer its full support of the Culture Connector, due to its need for more information on all available transit alternatives and the cost thereof.
- Equity and Social Justice – this is a mandate for all City of Seattle decisions, and the TAB enthusiastically supports this goal. The Transportation Equity Framework (TEF) is cited throughout the draft STP, and the TAB supports STM expenditures to correct past injustices in BIPOC and other underserved areas of Seattle, with the Transportation Access, and supports all programs and services that transit agencies enact to assist with equity and social justice.
- Fare Policies – the costs of enforcing fare avoidance policies may exceed the collection of these fines. This is not a sustainable policy, nor is eliminating fares in total and expecting the transit services can exist on subsidies alone. But, the TAB believes that no one should have barriers to ride transit, if they are unable to pay, and to that end, the STM-related programs currently being piloted for underserved and low-income populations, along with statewide youth fare-free programs are supported, and do help to make a difference in people’s lives.
- Next Generation ORCA – the TAB is awaiting the future of the ORCA card or similar payment system, and hopes that it is future orientated and allows the rider multiple uses of their ORCA card, not just for transit, but for their lifestyle. Whether based on a physical card or phone-based app, the ability for any rider to just “tap and go” cannot be understated in its convenience, quick boarding capabilities, and value-added options.
- Coordination of Transit Planning in Seattle – the TAB, like all modal boards, is asked to respond to the various reports created by City of Seattle agencies, as they relate to transit matters. We currently have issued our annual report for the STM, will issue one for the draft STP, and are awaiting the release of the Vision Zero and One Seattle/Comprehensive Plan, in the near future. We define success of these plans by what is achievable, not aspirational, what can be funded and completed, and how the ideas contribute to increasing ridership on transit vehicles in Seattle-King County, along

with being safe and cost-effective. No one plan can stand-alone, and we hope to assist in finding commonality along the plans.

In conclusion, the Transit Advisory Board (TAB) appreciates the opportunity to contribute its comments and suggestions on the 2023 Draft Seattle Transportation Plan (STP). SDOT does not work alone in its planning and implementation, and partners with transit agencies regionally, like Sound and METRO Transit, to coordinate its efforts. The TAB thanks SDOT for its work now and into the future to plan for a successful 20 year effort, in coordination with its partners, to keep our world class level of transit continuing.

The TAB is one of many Seattle modal boards with a section in the draft STP, and we will await the future revisions of the STP, and seek cooperative opportunities with other modal boards, as needed. The TAB is available for further discussion on anything in this report, either in-person and/or virtually.

Sincerely yours,

The Seattle Transit Advisory Board (TAB)