



Seattle
Department of
Transportation

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*The Seattle Transit Advisory Board shall **advise** the City Council, the Mayor, and all departments and offices of the City **on matters related to transit** and the possible and actual impact of actions taken by the City upon all forms of public transportation.*

*The Board shall be provided the opportunity to comment and make recommendations on City policies, plans, and projects as they may relate to **transit capital improvements, transit mobility, and transit operations** throughout the City...*

*The Board shall help facilitate City policies, plans, and projects that support local and region-wide transit mobility efforts, to help **ensure a functioning and coordinated transit system** throughout the City and region.*

*The Board shall function as the **public oversight committee of revenues collected under Seattle Transportation Benefit District (STBD) Proposition 1**, as described in Resolution 12 of the STBD...*

The Board shall make an annual report to the City Council on the status of its work program and the achievement of its goals.

**City Council Resolution
31572**

City of Seattle
Seattle Transit Advisory Board

August 14, 2023

Seattle City Council
council@seattle.gov
600 Fourth Avenue
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Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Councilmembers,

The Seattle Transit Advisory Board (TAB) is submitting its annual review of the Seattle Transit Measure (STM) for the period of January – December, 2022.

One of the TAB’s duties is to “*function as the public oversight committee of revenues collected under Seattle Transportation Benefit District (STBD) Proposition 1*” - now known as the **Seattle Transit Measure (STM)**. The Board takes this responsibility very seriously and is pleased to provide our comments below.

In general, the STM spending in a typical year by usage is: King County Metro Transit Service (55%), Capital Projects, Spot Improvements (18%), Transportation Access Program (13%), Emerging Mobility Needs (12%), and Planning & Analysis (2%).

Now in its second year, the 2020 Seattle Transit Measure (STM) continues to provide an average of \$50 million annually to assist with transit needs in the Seattle-King County area. Last year we were discussing the effects of COVID on ridership, and today we are happy to see transit ridership levels increasing throughout the system. Overall, the TAB continues to endorse the use of STM funds by SDOT in supporting METRO transit service, improving the Frequent Transit Network (FTN) as it strives to meet its targeted goals, improving its investments in equity priorities, especially with the targeted ORCA card investments and results, improving our streetscapes for the safety of pedestrians and riders, as well as bus stops, assisting our other modal forms of transportation, and enhancing street operations for transit.

The TAB knows that the FTN model was proposed in the 2016 Seattle Transit Master Plan, and since then, the STM team deserves congratulations on being able to “establish and document an equity-

focused transit service investment prioritization methodology” in 2022. We fully support an equity-focused model and will judge future usage of FTN funding through this lens. (It should also be noted that the TAB was involved in 2021-22 with SDOT developing said investment criteria.)

Last year’s report highlighted a few uses of the Transportation Access Programs (TAP) funding uses and the return on that investment, and TAB was fully supportive of the expenses and results. In 2022, the TAP has expanded to four major programs with up to \$10M in funding that can be expensed annually: Recovery Card Program (CID, Pioneer Square, Othello, and Rainier Beach), SHA Transit Program, Free Youth Transit Pass, and ORCA Opportunity Promise Scholars, Plus, Jump Start ORCA Program, Community Engagement Programs (Youth Ambassadors, Senior Programming, U-SEAT, Solid Ground Downtown Circulator, Program Creation Process). As the report mentions, the value and return on investment cannot always be “captured in numbers”, but in the changes in riders' lives and the continuing progress in equity and social justice that STM programs and services help provide. The TAB, again, fully supports these expenses and looks forward to what the future holds.

The Emerging Needs expenses were much needed after March 2020 with the closure of the West Seattle High Bridge, until its reopening on September 17, 2022. During 2022, STM funds were needed to purchase additional service hours on numerous Metro Transit routes, Water Taxi shuttle hours, and the innovative “Flip Your Trip” campaign, where riders were offered alternatives to driving alone with free rides, a \$25 ORCA Card, Transit Go apps, travel workshops, and personal trip planning. This program ran from September 2021-22. Survey results after the bridge reopened will assist staff with future planning options. When the West Seattle Low Bridge was out of service in December 2022, a rapid response was used based on lessons learned from the High Bridge incident. While no one can predict the future, the TAB supports the time and expense in planning for STM’s Emerging Transit Technology program, especially since it is done under the equity umbrella important in its mission. We look forward to future updates on examples of their vision for shared use transportation modes.

For STM Transit Capital Projects, up to \$3M may be spent annually (in 2022) on “projects to support infrastructure maintenance and capital improvements to increase efficiency of transit operations.” To support the FTN vision, the COVID Recovery Bus Lane Projects were continuing in 2022 (Rainier Ave S Bus Lane Project (Route 7), Aurora Ave N (RapidRide E Line), and 15th Ave W and Elliott Ave W (RapidRide D Line)) and designed to install “red lanes” in high ridership areas that maintained these levels during the pandemic. The TAB receives progress updates on these projects and supports the use of expenses for them, as it falls in the FTN and equity categories.

The TAB has received a presentation by SDOT on how their Transit Spot Improvement Program, funded by the Levy to Move Seattle, is able to quickly and efficiently take care of small projects, like “signal adjustments, bus stop enhancements, and improvements to pedestrian access to transit” for the monies expensed on these projects. We fully support the creative uses by the TSIP staff and the expenses that go along with it. While many riders may not be aware of these small-scale projects, the improvements they make to rider safety and experiences are essential.

STM funds are also used as seed monies for the design and development phase of Transit Plus Multimodal Corridor large-scale projects, for 2022, the STM has helped fund: NE 130th St/NE 125th St Transit Plus Multimodal Corridor Improvements, Harrison St Transit Corridor, Rt 48 Transit Plus

Multimodal Corridor (TPMC) Design. The TAB does receive updates on the progress on these planning and design projects and looks forward to updates in the future.

The 2022 STM Annual Report also mentions the upcoming Seattle Transportation Plan, and that the STM will do a refresh of the FTN starting in 2024. We all await the release of the STP, and the TAB will issue its comments on that report to the SDOT Transit and Mobility Division, and work with all modal boards to fully implement the transportation issues addressed in it.

The TAB knows that the majority of funding in the STM is for purchasing service hours and keeping transit services adequate to meet the needs of the community. However, we do have concerns that post-COVID, there have been ongoing driver shortages, canceled runs, and items that funding alone cannot solve. Therefore, the TAB welcomes the opportunity for updates in 2023 on increased service hours and runs, or a realistic assessment of what can be accomplished with the work force and usable buses available. For example, if there is a shortage of operators, could existing service hours purchased be optimized through the further development of transit infrastructure such as dedicated bus lanes or intersections with Transit Signal Priority technologies implemented? The TAB encourages SDOT to look further into actions that can be taken to help immediately address these issues for transit riders as we believe the current situation does merit urgency.

In terms of Capital Projects, the TAB fully supports having a "safety net" for unknown emergencies and unforeseeable transit needs. We hope that the funding will grow over the years (2023-24), and gradually decrease (2025-26), as projects are completed.

Should the STM consider investing in on-demand service in the future? Metro FLEX was being used in the Othello and Rainier Beach link light rail service areas to assist riders in reaching neighborhoods in the South Seattle area. While on-demand transit can assist riders in some areas, Metro and Via are still researching its potential for wider use, and in 2022, the STM staff is focusing on "fixed routes transit investments in order to deliver the FTN vision", and while the TAB understands their decision, it will ask the STM staff to continue researching how on-demand service can enhance delivery when using their previously mentioned "equity-focused transit service investments."

Finally, we'd like to thank the STM staff for recapping the financial realities at the end of their report: COVID-19 had a major impact on transit services, riders, and fare collection; Federal Relief Funds assist in offsetting operational and STM service investment costs, and maintaining service levels; Metro Capacity Constraints are well-known (operator and maintenance worker, and parts shortages); STM Reserves: a \$20M reserve balance in this fund is a necessary to "weather future changes and uncertainties"; STM Budget Changes: the City Council approves a budget in November for the next year, and decisions made at that time, that impact transportation services, fall onto SDOT to resolve, and report back its solutions to the City Council, as well as the TAB, as the oversight agency for STM expenses.

Sincerely yours,

The Seattle Transit Advisory Board (TAB) Members