Seattle Department of Transportation

2025 SEATTLE STREETCAR OPERATIONS REPORT

Seattle Department of Transportation

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Executive Summary

For over 19 years, the Seattle Streetcar system has been providing reliable and modern streetcar transit service to Seattle residents, workers, and visitors. The City of Seattle owns and funds the Seattle Streetcar, and partners with King County Metro (Metro) to operate the system on the City's behalf.

The Seattle Streetcar system consists of two streetcar lines:

- South Lake Union Streetcar (SLU) opened in 2007.
- First Hill Streetcar (FHS) opened in 2016.

In accordance with ***Ordinance 124946***, this report provides an update on Seattle Streetcar operations, performance, and financial metrics in 2025.

2025 HIGHLIGHTS

Seattle Streetcar delivered a strong year in 2025, driving significant growth in ridership and fare revenue while improving fare programs, safety, and the overall rider experience.

Systemwide ridership continued to grow in 2025, increasing 9% compared to 2024.

In 2025, there were **1,624,487** riders using the Seattle Streetcar system.

- 2025 ridership on the First Hill Line[1] increased by approximately 6% over 2024.
- 2025 ridership on the South Lake Union Line[2] increased by approximately 26% over 2024.

Overall, system ridership was up 9% over 2024. Productivity on the SLU and FHS lines, as measured by riders per revenue hour, also increased in 2025, up 6% compared to 2024.

Seattle Streetcar improved the regional rider experience by aligning fares for more seamless connections. It also expanded and permanently adopted reduced fare programs to support more equitable access to transit.

To advance SDOT's mission to provide safe and affordable access to places and opportunities, SDOT updated fares in alignment with our regional transit partners, King County Metro and Sound Transit.

Key highlights included:

- A $3 adult fare change (from $2.25) started in line with Metro and Sound Transit in September 2025, to create a seamless rider experience, and increase farebox recovery.
- Permanently adopted ORCA LIFT fares at $1.00, to support affordable transit access.
- Began participating in the Human Service ORCA Pilot, providing riders receiving services at human service agencies fully subsidized multi-ride passes, providing a low barrier way to access transit.

Overall, in 2025, there was a 35% increase in fare revenue over 2024.

The Streetcar Safety and Security Program made substantial improvements

- As of April 1, 2025, Metro Transit Police (MTP) began serving as the primary law enforcement agency for Seattle Streetcar, bringing streetcar security services into alignment with King County Metro and Sound Transit Link, creating a consistent experience across transit in Seattle. MTP also provides resource officers who connect transit riders with services, including helping riders enroll in reduced fares, and providing referrals to community-based organizations such as housing, behavioral health specialists, and recovery services.
- As of May 31,2025, streetcar began fare enforcement in line with King County Metro. Existing streetcar security officers began providing fare enforcement services at that time.
- A Roadway Worker Protection (RWP) program was developed in response to federal regulatory requirements and to increase safety for streetcar employees working in the right of way.
- Overall safety and security incidents trended downward compared to 2024.

[1]As reported by King County Metro to the National Transit Database.
[2]As reported by King County Metro to the National Transit Database.

SDOT celebrated Seattle's Filipino community by updating the Chinatown International District vehicle

- SDOT made a cultural update to the Chinatown-International District (C-ID) streetcar vehicle design, adding text representing Filipinotown.
- On May 21, 2025, SDOT and King County Metro held an event celebrating as part of Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month. The design commemorates the rich cultural history and lasting contributions of the Filipino community, particularly in Seattle's Chinatown-International District.

Continued progress on spot improvements to enhance safety, performance, and reliability.

The SDOT Transit Spot Improvements Program completed several projects to increase safety for people walking, biking, and rolling around the streetcar tracks, and to improve streetcar travel time and reliability. Projects included:

- Restricted right turns onto Denny from Westlake Avenue to prevent collisions; this project began as a safety project to protect streetcars from right turn collisions and created positive impacts to bus and streetcar reliability, and pedestrian safety.
- Added red street marking to prevent cars from using the streetcar-only lane at Yesler Way and 14th Avenue.

Introduction

Seattle City ***Ordinance 124946*** requires the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) to submit a report to the Chair of the City Council's Sustainability and Transportation Committee (now split into the Transportation, Waterfront, and Seattle Center Committee and the Governance and Utilities Committee) on the operations of all operating streetcar lines. This requirement has been in place since December 2015.

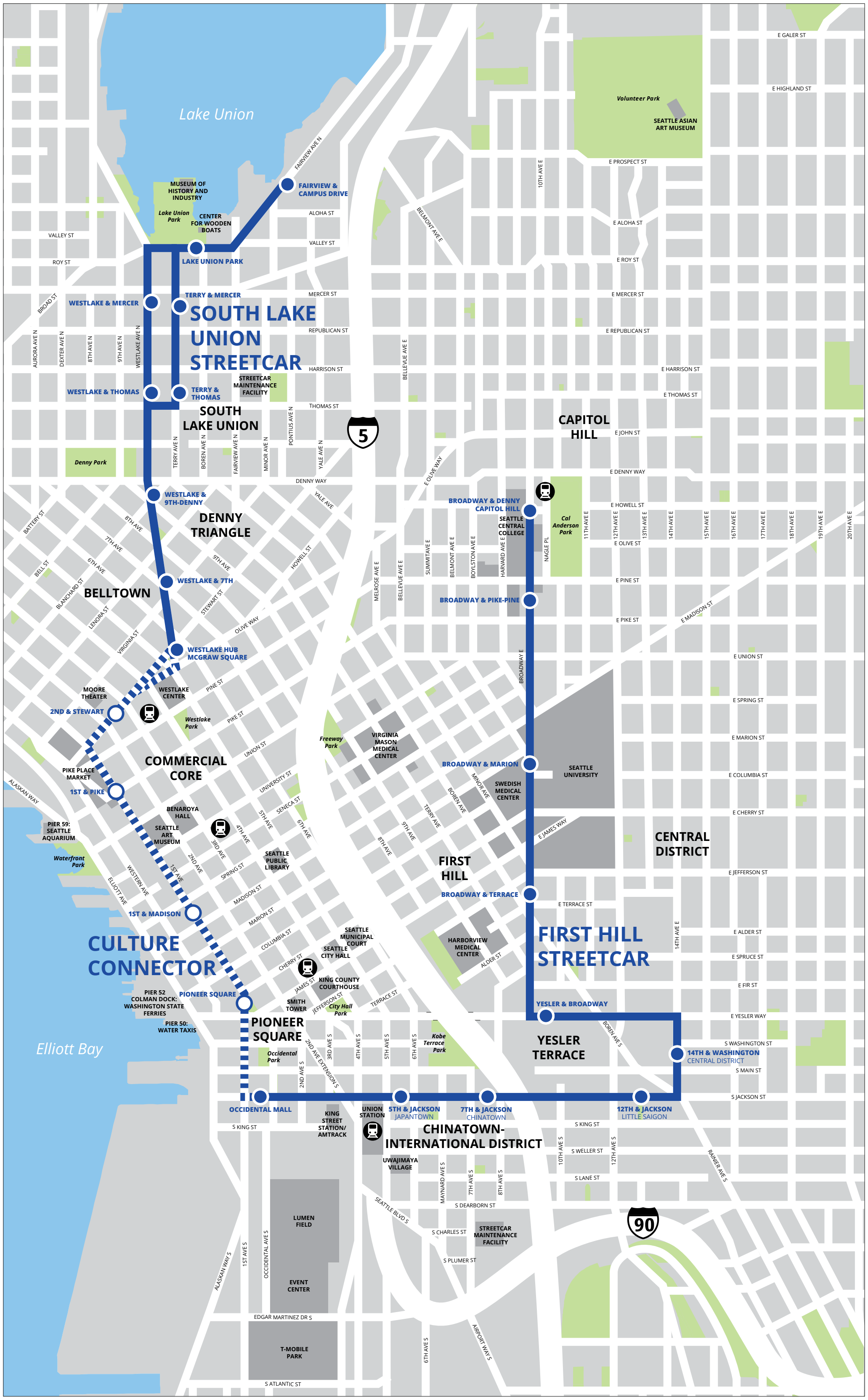
Ordinance 124946 states:

> *"The report shall include both performance metrics and financial metrics; and will include data for the past 5 years, estimates for the current year, and projections for the next 5 years. Performance metrics shall include ridership, farebox recovery ratio, productivity (riders per revenue hour), fare evasion, and reliability. Financial metrics shall include costs, including operating payments to King County, SDOT direct costs and contingency, and major maintenance expenditures; revenues, including farebox recovery, sponsorships and donations, grants, and intergovernmental revenues; and actual use of funds from the Consolidated (Residual) Cash Pool1F for interim financing. Financial reporting shall identify variances from financial projections included in the Adopted Budget. The report shall include a narrative to describe any significant operational policy changes and explain any significant variation from budgeted projections. SDOT may adjust the performance and financial metrics with the written concurrence of the Chair of the Transportation Committee, to reflect changes to reporting methods from King County or other sources of data. The report shall be submitted in writing to the Chair of the Transportation Committee."*

In 2019, SDOT entered an Interlocal Agreement with King County Metro, whereby prior calendar year operating costs for FHS and SLU are reconciled by June 30 of each year. Through the reconciliation process, Metro compiles all actual costs incurred to operate the streetcars and compares the amount to invoices paid by SDOT monthly throughout the year, with a financial settlement as needed. It takes Metro three months to produce the final actual costs incurred, as financial systems close out the previous year during the first quarter. Once reconciliation is complete, SDOT can prepare the analysis included in the annual report. This reconciliation process only happens once a year. Since 2019, SDOT has prepared an annual report which aligns with this annual reconciliation process, rather than the bi-annual report requested in Ordinance 124946.

Figure 1 shows the South Lake Union and First Hill Streetcar segment alignments along with the long-proposed Culture Connector (formerly the Center City Connector or C3 project) route.

Figure 1: Seattle Streetcar System Map



DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE MAP

SOUTH LAKE UNION STREETCAR

The South Lake Union Streetcar was approved by the City Council in 2005 in response to efforts to develop the South Lake Union neighborhood into a biotechnology and biomedical research hub. The $56.4 million line was funded nearly 50% by property owners along the alignment and the remainder by federal, state, and local funds.

The SLU line started operations on December 12, 2007. It conveniently connects thousands of jobs in the South Lake Union neighborhood to the downtown core and additional regional transit connections at Westlake. There are nine stops along the alignment leading to restaurants, retail, businesses, and Lake Union's 12-acre waterfront park. The southern terminus at Westlake/McGraw Square is a block away from Monorail and the Link Light Rail station at Westlake Center. SLU is served by an Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF) located at 318 Fairview Ave N.

The SLU line is 1.3 miles long and operates through mixed traffic. The alignment currently consists of approximately 90% dedicated right of way (both business and transit access and streetcar-only lanes). Once the Rapid Ride J line project, extending from the University District to Belltown is completed, the SLU streetcar alignment will operate in approximately 95% dedicated right of way. The line is served by a fleet of four Inekon-brand vehicles operating in mixed right-of-way and powered exclusively by an overhead contact system. SLU operates an average 10- to 15-minute service frequency from 6:00am – 9:00pm weekdays, 7:00am-9:00pm Saturdays and 10:00am-7:00pm Sundays.

FIRST HILL STREETCAR

The First Hill Streetcar was approved by the Seattle City Council in December 2008. The First Hill Streetcar connects major medical facilities, Seattle Central College, Seattle University, and a variety of neighborhoods to the King Street mobility hub, which provides connections to Sounder trains, Link light rail, and regional bus transit. Construction of the First Hill Streetcar line was funded by Sound Transit. Due to high construction and engineering risks, Sound Transit removed the proposed First Hill station from the North Link preferred route in July 2005 and funded a streetcar connection instead. Construction began in late April 2012, and operation began in January 2016.

The First Hill Streetcar line consists of 10 stops and is 2.5 miles long. The line is served by a fleet of six Inekon-brand vehicles operating in mixed right-of-way and powered by both an overhead contact system and an onboard energy storage system (batteries). It provides an average 15- to 20-minute service frequency from 5:00am-10:30pm weekdays, 6:00am-10:30pm Saturdays and 10:00am-8:00pm Sundays. FHS is served by an OMF located at 848 7th Ave S.

CULTURE CONNECTOR (FORMERLY CENTER CITY CONNECTOR)[3]

The Culture Connector (formerly the Center City Connector or C3) is an identified project that would connect the South Lake Union and First Hill streetcars. It would create new north-south connections from Stewart St in Westlake to Jackson St in Pioneer Square via 1st Ave and allow for a unified streetcar line. In 2023, a Culture Connector Delivery Assessment was undertaken to update project assumptions, cost estimates, and delivery approaches. The report was released in early 2024 and is available on the project website. While the project is not currently advancing, the Culture Connector is part of the long-term transportation network, as identified in the Council-adopted Seattle Transportation Plan. For the purposes of this report, future year projections include only SLU and FHS operations.

[3]During Council's budget discussions in the fall of 2024, Council removed all unsecured funding from the Culture Connector project, no appropriations were included in the 2025-2030 Adopted CIP, and the project is no longer listed in the Adopted CIP.

Operation Highlights

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE AND BUDGET OVERVIEW

The South Lake Union and First Hill Streetcar lines are owned by the City of Seattle and operated by King County Metro (Metro). This partnership, including respective roles, responsibilities, and funding commitments, is detailed in the 2019 Interlocal Agreement (ILA) between the City of Seattle and King County. This agreement was executed in December 2019 and replaced the 2014 Amended & Restated ILA between the City of Seattle and King County. An amendment was executed in 2022 clearly defining safety roles and responsibilities to align with updated federal requirements. Another amendment was executed in 2024, renewing Metro's funding support to the City of Seattle for the next five years at $1.7 million per year. The latest amendment in 2024 also secured increased access to more of Metro's agency-wide services, such as customer information through social media and transit alerts and participation in County-led customer surveying, data collection, performance reporting, and analysis.

Metro, as operator of the Seattle Streetcar system, employs approximately 62 operators, supervisors, and maintenance staff dedicated to streetcar operations across both SLU and FHS lines. While nearly all day-to-day operations and maintenance responsibilities reside with Metro under the ILA, SDOT is responsible for decisions regarding safety, overall budget and financial planning, representation of the streetcar in regional planning efforts, level of service, fare policy and enforcement, and long-term asset management.

In addition to revenues and expenses from Metro, the overall streetcar operations and maintenance budget includes revenue generated from the streetcar sponsorship program, federal grants, a contribution from the Seattle Transit Measure, and cash fares collected directly by SDOT from streetcar ticket vending machines. It also includes costs directly incurred by SDOT for such items as labor for program management and safety oversight, asset repairs, right-of-way maintenance, and other operations and maintenance activities not performed by Metro.

SAFETY & SECURITY

The Seattle Streetcar is a Rail Transit Agency (RTA) subject to oversight by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), which serves on behalf of the federal government as the State Safety Oversight Agency (SSOA) for the State of Washington. In July 2019, the Federal Transit Administration's Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP) final rule (49 CFR Part 673) became effective. The final rule made major changes to the safety requirements and responsibilities of rail transit agencies, the largest of which required SDOT to develop a PTASP based on Safety Management System (SMS) principles and methods.

Under these regulations, SDOT employs a Chief Safety Officer (CSO) who reports directly to the Accountable Executive (the SDOT Director) on streetcar safety. The CSO has direct responsibility for implementing the safety plan as well as the associated Safety Management System (SMS) which is designed to broaden the culture of safety within a transit agency.

Many of the day-to-day responsibilities governing safety and security continue to be administered by Metro as the operator, including accident notification, reporting, and investigation. SDOT is responsible for safety certification, safety oversight, and internal safety auditing. SDOT is also the owner of the Transit Asset Management Plan (TAMP), which is referenced by the PTASP and reinforces State of Good Repair decision making.

Several significant programmatic changes occurred in 2025. The City and County agreed to have the Metro Transit Police (MTP) become the primary law enforcement response to streetcar security issues, bringing Seattle Streetcar into alignment with Metro bus and Sound Transit Link light rail transit services, creating consistency across the Seattle network for riders and operators. In addition to emergency law enforcement response, MTP provides regular on-board patrols, emphasis patrols, operator training, detectives, and resource officers.

Transit Resource Officers serve as both a law enforcement presence and provide resources, such as helping riders enroll in reduced fares and providing referrals to community-based organizations for housing, behavioral health specialists, and recovery services.

Seattle Streetcar Fare enforcement also began in line with King County Metro in 2025, utilizing Metro's contracted fare enforcement officers and a new approach to fare inspections that came out of the SaFE Equity Workgroup. This approach is more customer-focused, less punitive, and aims to get fare products to riders. The violation processing has also been moved in house to Metro, removing court involvement and creating better resolutions, including more shelter and human services referrals in partnership with DCHS (Department of Community and Human Services). King County's Department of Community and Humans Services can assist with referrals for a range of housing, specialized services, food benefits, and essential needs.

A new Roadway Worker Protection (RWP) program was published in response to new federal regulatory requirements. The RWP program sets new safety standards for workers who perform their work on or near the streetcar tracks. Overall, safety and security incidents decreased compared to 2024.

Safety Report

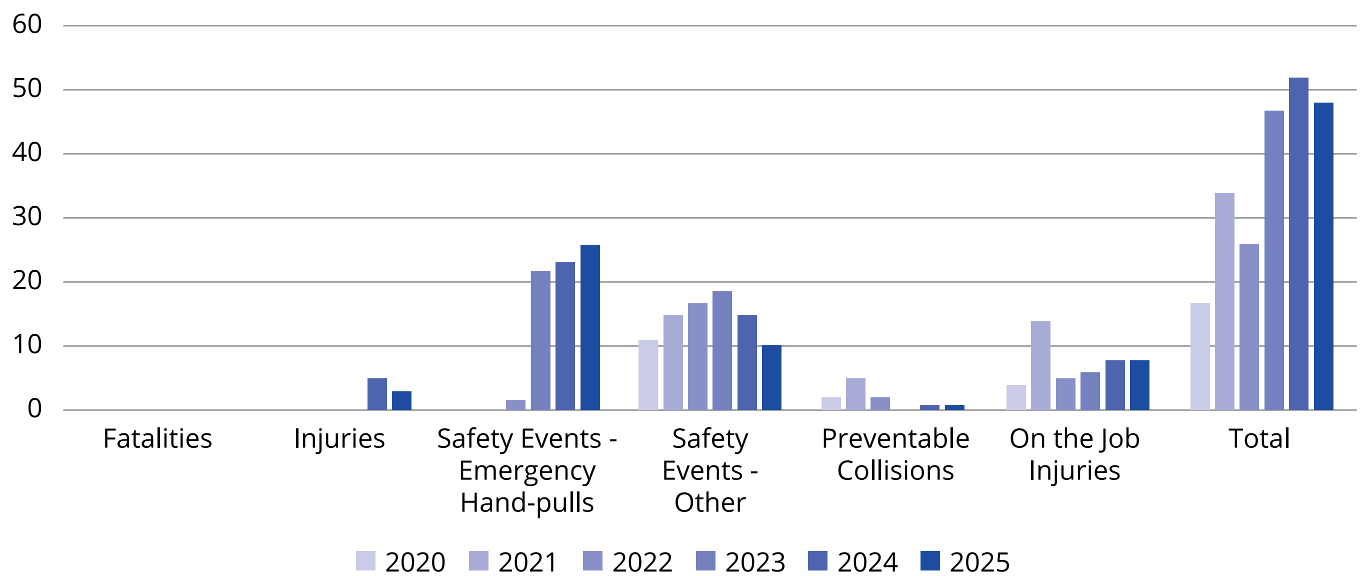
Operational safety is measured by data generated by safety events. A safety event is defined as:

> *"A reportable event meeting the National Transit Database (NTD) threshold for collision, fire, derailment, hazardous material spill, act of God or other incident that requires medical attention for one person and meets the reportable threshold."*

In 2025, total safety events were reduced or equal across all metrics. There continue to be no recorded fatalities associated with the streetcar, and infrequent incidents of injury or preventable collisions. The low number of preventable collisions continues to be a noteworthy achievement for the streetcar program.

The category with the most safety events is emergency handle-pulls (72% of 2025 safety events). Emergency handle-pull safety events are when a rider pulls the emergency handle outside of an emergency situation to exit the vehicle between stops (often when the vehicle is slowed or stopped by traffic). Signage was added to streetcar vehicles in 2025 to discourage this behavior and minor decreases were observed. In the chart below, the category for Safety Events is comprised of incidents such as emergency handle pulls, non-preventable streetcar collisions and other events such as a passenger falling on the streetcar.[4]

Figure 2: Seattle Streetcar Safety Events January 2020 -December 2025



DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE CHART

[4]Emergency hand-pulls were not reported to WSDOT's Safety and Security Office until 2022.

Security Report

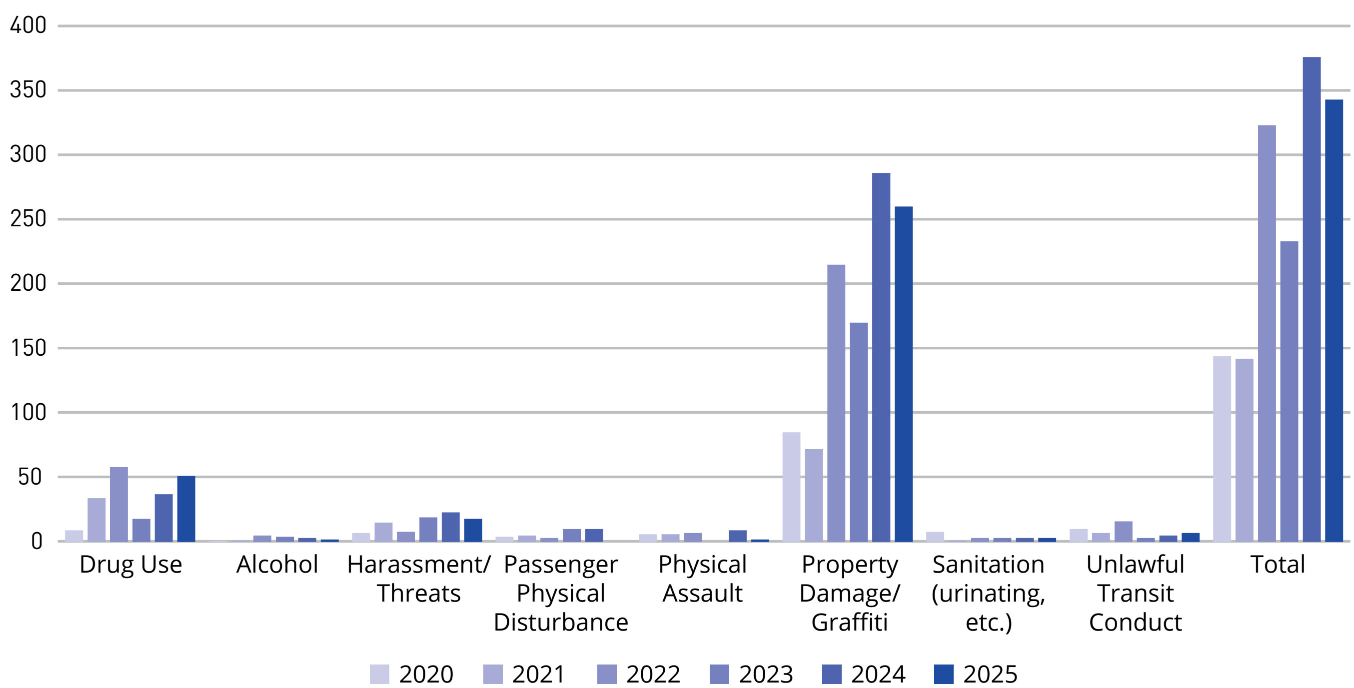
Security incidents are defined by Federal Transit Administration (FTA) as:

> *"An incident that poses a security risk to passengers or employees such as vandalism or assault. Security incidents can occur on the streetcar, on the platform, or occur as a result of an outside incident that overlaps with streetcar service."*

Since 2021, Metro has deployed privately contracted security personnel on streetcar service, with SDOT agreeing to incur costs for security personnel. Security staff are trained to be customer service representatives first and security de-escalation second with the ability to call on law enforcement as required. The implementation of security enforcement is consistent with the Metro Safety, Security, and Fare Enforcement (SaFE) Reform initiative[5] which guides Metro's deployment of security staff on Metro Bus Operations. This provides consistency between security service on streetcar and bus systems. Feedback continues to be positive related to the presence of security personnel on board streetcars and at platforms. In 2025, security personnel services were deployed across the streetcar system for eight hours per day, seven days a week across both lines. This represents a doubling of service hours from four hours per day in the 2021-24 timeframe.

Figure 3 shows the number and types of reported security incidents from 2020 to 2025.

Figure 3: Seattle Streetcar Security Incidents January 2020-December 2025



DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE CHART

[5]kingcounty.gov/en/dept/metro/about/policies/safe-reform-initiative

Performance Metrics

RIDERSHIP

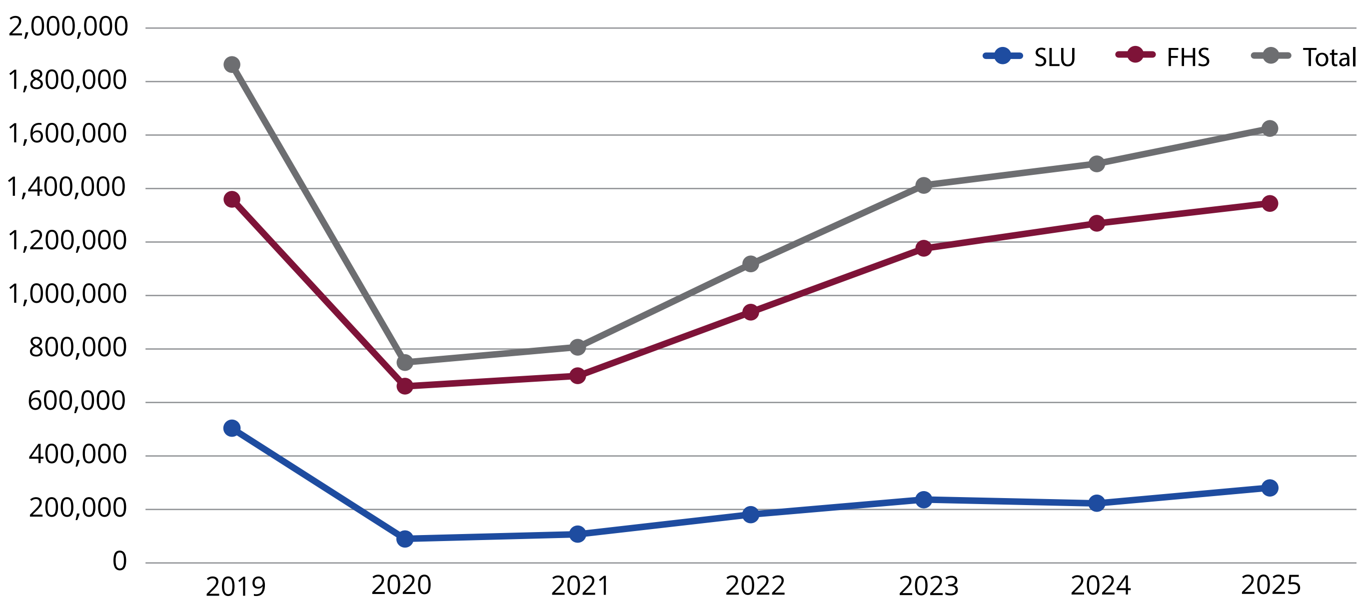
Systemwide ridership increased by approximately 9% in 2025 (approximately 132,127 more rides in 2025) compared to 2024. SDOT collects Streetcar ridership numbers via automatic passenger counters installed onboard vehicles. These numbers are validated by King County Metro using manual ride checks and statistical analysis, before being sent to the National Transit Database (NTD), creating the true ridership values. Ridership trends from 2020 to 2028 are shown in Figure 4.

- 2025 ridership on the First Hill Line[6] increased by approximately 6% over 2024. 2025 ridership on First Hill was like Metro's bus routes 2 and 48.
- 2025 ridership on the South Lake Union Line[7] increased by approximately 26% over 2024. 2025 ridership on South Lake Union was like Metro's bus routes 125 and 27.

Actual ridership and updated projections are located within Table 1.

[6]As reported by King County Metro to the National Transit Database.
[7]As reported by King County Metro to the National Transit Database.

Figure 4: Seattle Streetcar Ridership (National Transit Data Base Reported) 2019-2025



DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE CHART

Data Table

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
SLU	518,249	535,288	513,523	503,374	89,414	107,145	180,211	236,121	222,592	280,106
FHS	840,049	882,219	1,159,904	1,360,035	660,029	698,975	937,394	1,175,767	1,269,768	1,344,381
Total	1,358,298	1,417,507	1,673,427	1,863,409	749,443	806,120	1,117,605	1,411,888	1,492,360	1,624,487

Table 1: Ridership Actuals and Projections 2020-2030

	Actuals					
Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
FHS	660,029	698,975	937,394	1,175,767	1,269,768	1,344,381
SLU	89,414	107,145	180,211	236,121	222,592	280,106
Totals	**749,443**	**806,120**	**1,117,605**	**1,411,888**	**1,492,360**	**1,624,487**

	Projected				
Year	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
FHS	1,384,712	1,426,254	1,469,041	1,513,113	1,558,506
SLU	336,127	403,353	484,023	498,544	513,500
Totals	**1,720,840**	**1,829,606**	**1,953,065**	**2,011,657**	**2,072,006**

RELIABILITY

Reliability is measured based on the arrival time of a given streetcar at designated points along the route between 7:00am and 7:00pm, relative to the scheduled arrival time. A streetcar is "on-time" if it arrives within a five-minute window prior to or later than the scheduled time at the designated time point. This is consistent with Metro Bus Operations measure of reliability.

Reliability for the FHS line improved in 2025 from 80% to 82%, which aligns with Metro Bus Operations (78%)[8]. Reliability on the SLU line declined from 56% to 45%. The largest factor in reliability is general purpose traffic, including right-turning vehicles in transit-only lanes. Declines in reliability in 2025 for South Lake Union are attributed to increasing general purpose travel that share the lane with streetcar vehicles and delay transit progression. With employers such as Amazon returning to office three times a week starting in 2023 and five days a week in 2025, the South Lake Union Streetcar experienced declines in reliability with increased general-purpose traffic.

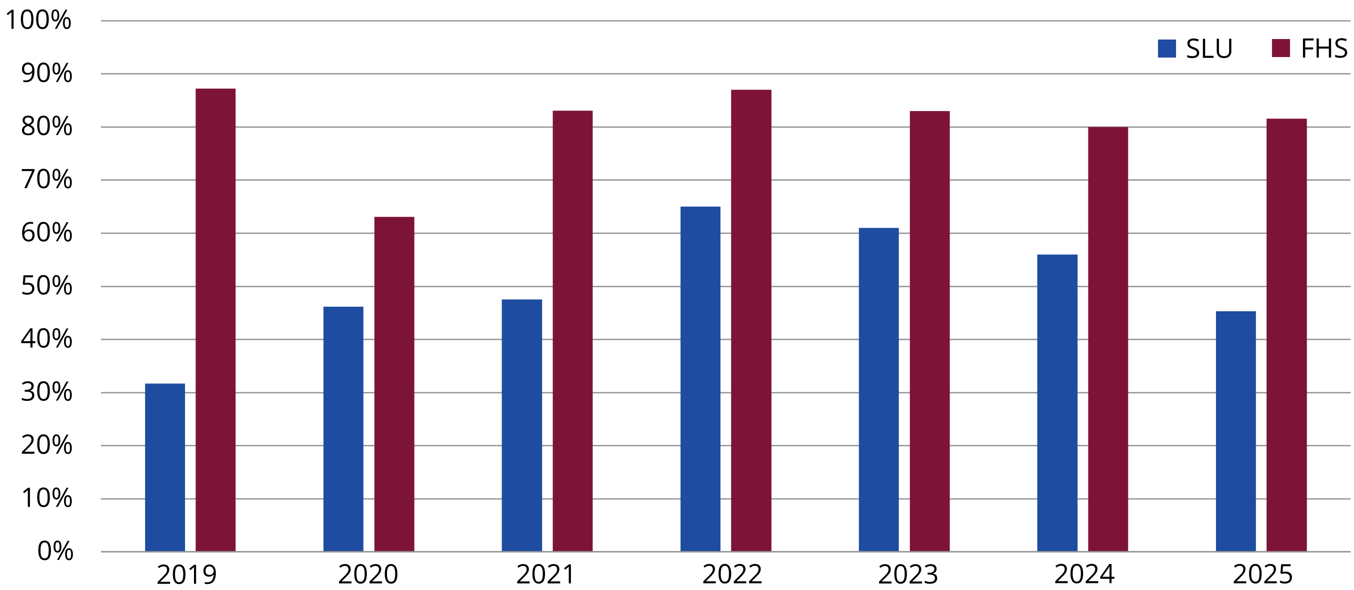
Data collection is another variable in analyzing trends over time. Metro is upgrading Seattle Streetcar's Computer-Aided Dispatch/Automatic Vehicle Location (CAD/AVL) system in 2026, which will provide train dispatch and real-time tracking. This should also improve data collection for both on-time performance and passenger boardings.

In October 2025, SDOT also made a capital improvement to improve streetcar safety and reliability along the South Lake Union line by restricting right turns onto Denny Street from Westlake Avenue. Data is too preliminary to examine the impact of this improvement, but program staff will be tracking outcomes of the improvement in 2026.

Figure 5 shows the average annual percentage of time each line was operating "on-time."

[8]Per Metro's 2025 System Evaluation Report

Figure 5: Seattle Streetcar On-Time Performance 2019-2025 [9]



DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE CHART

Data Table

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
SLU	32%	46%	48%	65%	61%	56%	45%
FHS	87%	63%	83%	87%	83%	80%	82%

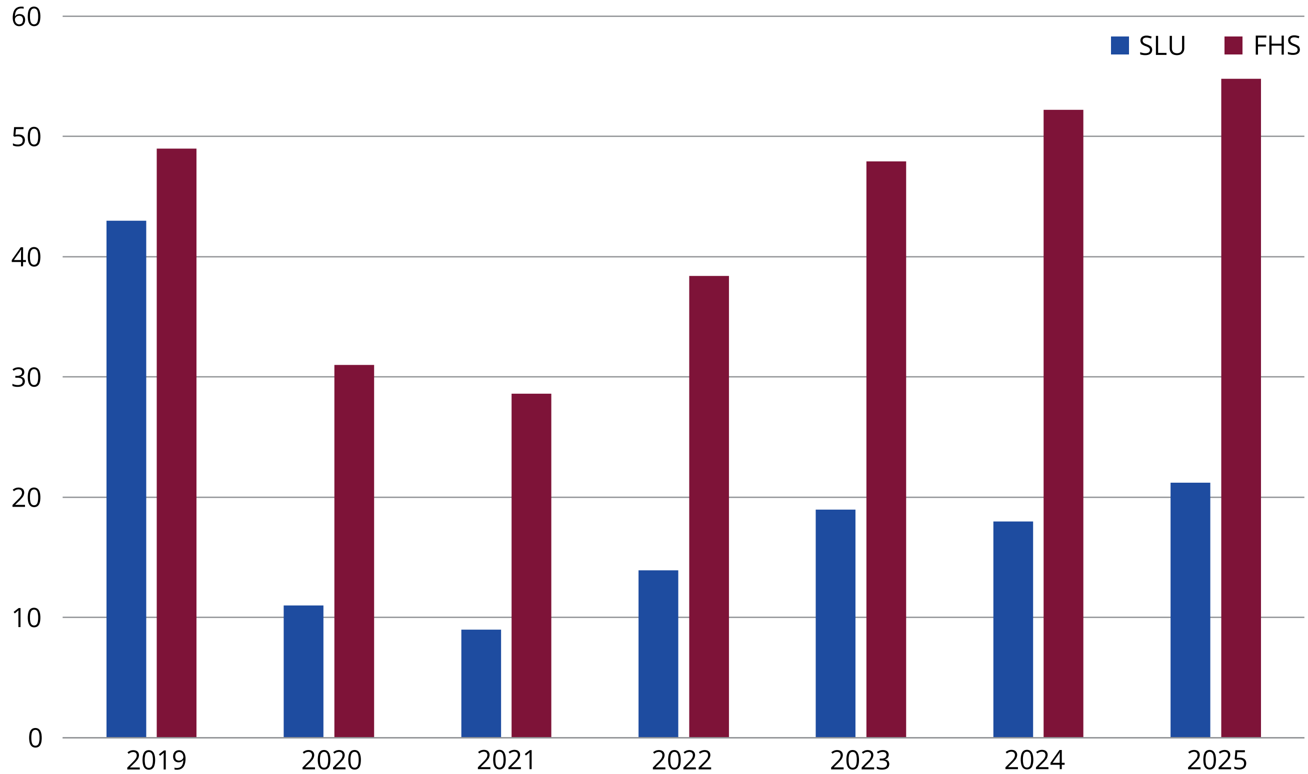
[9]Data begins at 2016 for FHS as that is when revenue service began for the line.

PRODUCTIVITY

Productivity on the SLU and FHS lines, as measured by riders per revenue hour, increased in 2025. Productivity is measured by calculating the number of riders, compared to the number of hours streetcar is operating scheduled service, or revenue hours.8F Revenue Hours are defined as the number of hours streetcars are operating scheduled service. This time does not include layover or deadhead time. Transit agencies use this indicator to manage service. SLU operated approximately 13,206 revenue hours, serving 21 riders per revenue hour. This is an 18% increase from 2024. FHS operated approximately 24,536 revenue hours, serving 55 riders per revenue hour. This is a 5% increase from 2024. Productivity of the FHS is roughly twice that of the overall Metro bus system (average of 23 riders per revenue hour[10]). Figure 6 shows the productivity of each line.

[10]Based on an average of the data provided on ***Metro's Productivity Performance Report***.

Figure 6: Seattle Streetcar Productivity 2019-2025 (Riders per Revenue Hour)



DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE CHART

Data Table

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
SLU	43	11	9	14	19	18	21
FHS	49	31	29	38	48	52	55

PERFORMANCE AND SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

In 2025, the SDOT Transit Spot Improvement Program completed projects along both lines to reduce operational and safety conflicts for streetcar and other users and improve streetcar travel time and reliability. Table 2 outlines the safety improvement locations and dates completed.

Table 2: 2025 Streetcar Spot Improvements

Location	Project	Date Completed
14th Ave and East Yesler Way	Red paint to signify transit only lane to discourage use by general purpose traffic	Q2 2025
Westlake Ave and Denny Way	Restrict right turns on Westlake Ave at Denny	Q4 2025

Red paint to warn vehicles of streetcar only lane

Restrict right turns on Westlake Ave at Denny

Financial Metrics

OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE COSTS

Systemwide, in 2025, total operations and maintenance costs for the Seattle Streetcar were approximately $14.7 million, a 3% decrease from 2024. Total operations and maintenance costs include both contracted services from King County Metro to operate and maintain both streetcar lines and other City costs to manage the streetcar system.

Metro's costs to operate and maintain the streetcar include full-time King County Metro Streetcar Section employees (63 staff positions), parts and supplies, and labor from other supporting divisions at King County Metro (Information Technology, Human Resources, Facilities, Power and Distribution, etc.). Metro's gross costs (minus fare revenue and Metro operating contributions) were approximately $13.3 million in 2025, a 1% decrease from 2024. This is largely driven by a vacant King County Metro Streetcar Section Manager position (now filled in 2026) and high increases in fare revenue (35% in 2025). Actual Metro costs incurred in SDOT's accounting system are offset by ORCA fare revenue and Metro operating contributions.

SDOT streetcar costs include staff time, utilities for the streetcar system and facilities, crew-led system repairs, and other supportive services such as landscaping and signage maintenance. SDOT-only streetcar expenses were approximately $1.3 million in 2025, a 16% decrease compared to 2024, due to fewer major repairs in 2025.

Detailed financial metrics, including historic and projected operations and maintenance costs, can be found in Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6. These tables show both gross and net expenditures, as fare revenue, federal grant credits or King County Metro operating contributions are seen as credits on King County Metro operating invoices. SDOT's financial system does not reflect these financial line items as these are credits netted against Metro Operating Invoices and are not directly received through SDOT's accounting system.

FUNDING

Public transit systems require a mix of revenue and local fund sources to meet operating and maintenance expenses. In 2025, the Seattle Streetcar funding sources included fare revenue (through ORCA and ticket vending machine sales), sponsorships, contributions from King County Metro, Federal grants (FTA 5307 funds for preventative maintenance), and ***Seattle Transit Measure sales tax funding***. Amazon previously provided a 10-year (ending in 2024) operating subsidy to South Lake Union Streetcar operations. This was based on a South Lake Union Master Use Permit, which included a commitment to purchase an additional streetcar vehicle and provide a 10-year operating subsidy to run additional service. These revenues are noted in the Revenue section of tables 3, 4, 5, and 6.

For several years, the City received substantial external funding to support Streetcar operations, especially for the First Hill line. However, in recent years, several sources expired or declined.

- As part of the agreement to build the FHS line, Sound Transit provided 10 years of operating funding that expired in 2023.
- Federal funds allocated annually through the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) are now being distributed through a more competitive process; meaning that the streetcar will not be guaranteed to receive grant funds annually.
- One-time pandemic-era federal funds allocated directly to City provided as a credit on Metro service invoices, are fully utilized.

These combined factors led to a substantial increase in the amount of City funding needed to operate the streetcar. Seattle Transit Measure funds replaced Commercial Parking Tax as the primary local funding source in 2025.

Fare Policy and Revenue

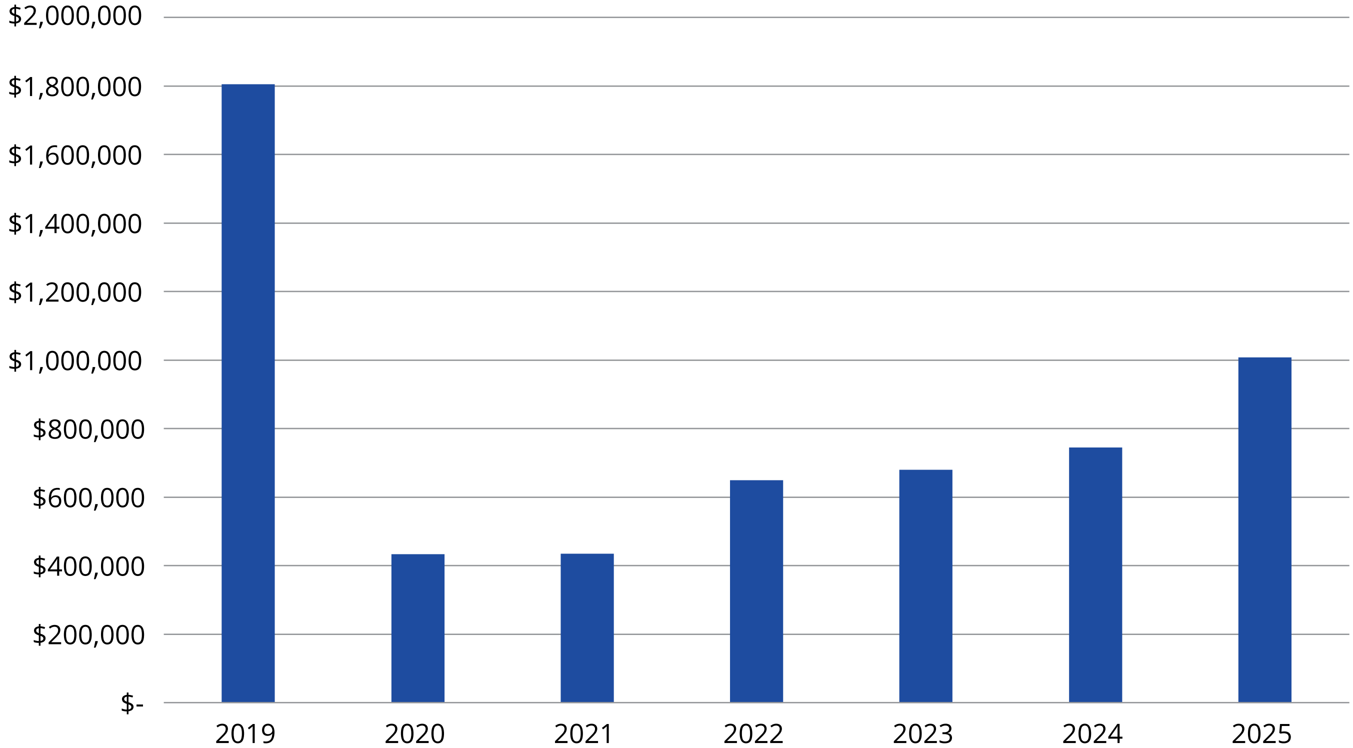
Overall, fare revenue increased 35% in 2025 (~$1.1 million) compared to 2024 (~$745,000). This large increase is due to several factors including beginning fare enforcement, increasing streetcar ridership, and a fare change.

In May 2025, SDOT began fare enforcement on Seattle Streetcar aligned with King County Metro practices. In September 2025, King County Metro bus, water taxi, and Seattle Streetcar updated full adult fares to $3. This brought the Metro-operated systems in line with Sound Transit's flat $3 fare on Link light rail and express buses. These changes increased streetcar fare revenue collection, helping to offset operating costs and support reduced fare programs.

94% of all Streetcar fare revenue comes from ORCA cards, with a small amount of fares (6%) generated from streetcar ticket vending machines (TVMs), which sell streetcar-only tickets. In 2026, the Streetcar ticket vending machines will be removed as "tap to pay" technology emerges on ORCA readers allowing riders to pay with their contactless debit or credit card, smartphone, or smart watch. This will be a net benefit for fare revenue as SDOT will no longer pay credit card fees or monthly technology charges for the ticket vending machines. This will generate additional ORCA revenue and allow riders without ORCA to transfer between transit services.

Yearly fare revenue can be found in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Fare Revenue Collected 2019-2025



DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE CHART

Equitable Access to Transit

Since 2022, SDOT made several fare policy decisions to expand equitable access to transit. Starting September 1, 2022, along with Metro and Sound Transit, SDOT implemented free fares for streetcar passengers 18 and under as part of the state-wide free youth fares program. Agencies throughout King County made this change simultaneously to create a seamless regional ridership experience.

Other fare policies in 2022 expanded equitable access included lowering the ORCA LIFT fare from $1.50 to $1.00 on a pilot basis starting September 2022, consistent with Metro and Sound Transit practices. In 2025, streetcar's ORCA LIFT fare became permanent, and the Subsidized Annual Pass Program was renewed until December 2026. The Subsidized Annual Pass Program provides a yearly fully subsidized ORCA card to adult riders who are enrolled in one of six state benefit programs.

Streetcar also expanded equitable access by participating in the Human Service ORCA Pilot in 2025, where riders receiving services at human service agencies can receive fully subsidized multi-ride passes, providing a low barrier way to access transit. Clients who receive the tickets meet the 138% Federal Poverty level and/or are experiencing homelessness.

In past years, SDOT analyzed the fare revenue impact of all these programs and found the financial impact to be limited. Overall, the reduced fare programs enrollment is continuing to grow in the region, with many riders choosing to re-enroll and ride transit. Streetcar saw a very large increase in ORCA LIFT (65%) riders and Subsidized Annual Pass (60%) riders in 2025 compared to 2024.

SDOT continues to monitor the impact of these fare programs through reviewing Metro data on enrollments and participating in multi-agency fare program forums.

Farebox Recovery and Fare Evasion

Fare revenue increased 35% in 2025 compared to 2024. Total fare revenue per boarding on streetcar increased in 2025, averaging $0.62, compared to $0.50 in 2024.

Fare evasion is the percentage of riders who do not purchase or possess the fare media required to travel. In 2025, Seattle Streetcar began conducting fare enforcement for the first time, in line with Metro practices. Verbal warning fare inspections started on March 31, 2025, with full fare enforcement beginning on May 31. This phased approach followed principles that came out of the SaFE Equity Workgroup to be more customer-focused, less punitive, and aims to get fare products to riders. Violation processing has also been moved in house to Metro, meaning no more court involvement and better fare resolutions (including more shelter and human services referrals in partnership with DCHS).

Fare evasion data is calculated using ORCA and ticket vending machine fare transactions compared to National Transit Database (NTD) validated passenger unlinked trip data[11]. This comparison shows the percentage of fare-paying passengers, compared to all passengers.

Based on this data, overall, the rate of non-payment system-wide decreased to 55% in 2025, compared to 63% in 2024. The rate of non-payment for FHS decreased in 2025 to 62%, compared to 71% in 2024. The rate of non-payment for SLU increased in 2025 to 27%, compared to 16% in 2024. This could be due to SLU's large ridership growth in 2025 (26%), and new riders being added to the system getting in the habit of ORCA tapping. Since full fare enforcement began on May 31, 2025, seven full months in 2025 had fare enforcement. Streetcar expects to see even further decreases in non-payment with a full year of fare enforcement being conducted in 2026.

Tables 7 and 8 show historic and actual ridership and estimated non-payment data. Farebox recovery ratios are the percentage of an agency's overall operating costs funded by the fares it collects. Farebox recovery ratios evaluate farebox revenue compared to operating costs. Fare evasion rates compare total riders to fare paying riders.

In 2025, systemwide, farebox recovery ratios increased to 7%, from 5% in 2024. The farebox recovery ratios for FHS and SLU were both 7% for 2025. In 2024, farebox recovery ratios for FHS and SLU were approximately 4% and 6%, respectively. This farebox recovery is likely due to decreasing overall costs in 2025, and higher revenue growth.

Farebox recovery per streetcar line is outlined in Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

[11] Unlinked Passenger Trips are the number of times passengers board public transportation vehicles.

Table 3: South Lake Union Historic and Current Operating Funding and Expenditures

Revenue	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Adopted Budget 2026	Projected 2026
Fare Revenue - TVM[12]	$47,000	$61,000	$60,000	$153,000	$57,000	$60,000	$7,000
Lease Revenue[13]	($89,000)						
Sponsorship	$86,000	$108,000		$107,000	$93,000	$97,000	$66,599
Federal Grants		$314,000		$1,269,000	$244,000		$526,191
Other Private Contributions - Amazon	$267,000	$264,000	$281,000	$282,000			
Operating Transfer In[14]	$1,683,000	$1,738,000	$1,879,000	$6,765,000	$4,080,000	$5,440,000	$5,973,215
Total Revenue	**$1,994,000**	**$2,485,000**	**$2,220,000**	**$8,576,000**	**$4,474,000**	**$5,597,000**	**$6,573,006**

Expenditures	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Adopted Budget 2026	Projected 2026
Metro Gross[15]	$3,552,000	$3,300,000	$4,343,000	$6,061,000	$6,207,883	$6,147,000	$5,908,576
Fare Revenue - ORCA	($124,000)	($217,000)	($181,000)	($265,000)	($293,876)	($302,000)	($303,000)
Federal Grants[16]	($250,000)	($630,000)					
Contribution from Metro	($1,597,000)	($1,644,000)	($1,694,000)	($1,745,000)	($1,700,000)	($1,700,000)	($1,700,000)
Metro Net	$1,581,000	$809,000	$2,468,000	$4,051,000	$4,214,000	$4,145,000	$3,838,000
Total Expenditures	**$2,069,000**	**$1,340,000**	**$3,116,000**	**$4,690,000**	**$4,679,007**	**$4,534,000**	**$4,554,576**

[12]Collection of fare revenues by SDOT through ticket vending machines ended in 2026. King County Metro added "tap to pay" technology on ORCA readers eliminating the need for ticket vending machines.
[13]Seattle City Light previously rented space in the 318 Fairview building (which shares spaces with the SLU Streetcar Operations and Maintenance facility is located) but ended in 2020. They received credit for their 2021 payment, since the space was no longer needed.
[14]Intradepartmental transfers made from SDOT managed Transportation Fund using Commercial Parking Tax funding through 2022. The funding was switched to the Transportation Benefit District Fund starting in 2023.
[15]Metro Operating Costs displayed here show true operating costs (not what is deducted from the invoices). Net operating costs are shown below with deductions removed.
[16]CARES, CRRSAA, and ARPA credits were deducted from Metro Operating Invoices and not directly received by SDOT.

Table 4: South Lake Union Projected Funding and Expenses

Revenues	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Sponsorship	$93,000	$93,000	$96,000	$100,000	$104,000
Operating Transfer In	$5,653,600	$5,844,071	$5,977,600	$6,514,400	$7,100,696
Total Revenue	**$5,746,600**	**$5,937,071**	**$6,073,600**	**$6,614,400**	**$7,204,696**

Expenditures	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
SDOT	$669,725	$693,000	$708,000	$733,000	$759,000
Metro Gross	$6,034,954	$6,185,000	$6,342,000	$4,823,000	$4,999,000
Fare Revenue - ORCA	($312,000)	($321,000)	($343,000)	($378,000)	($403,000)
Contribution from Metro	($1,700,000)	($1,700,000)	($1,700,000)		
Metro Net	$4,021,000	$4,164,000	$4,299,000	$4,445,000	$4,596,000
Total Expenditures	**$4,692,679**	**$4,857,000**	**$5,007,000**	**$5,178,000**	**$5,355,000**

Table 5: First Hill Streetcar Historic and Current Funding and Expenses

Revenues	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Adopted Budget 2026	Projected 2026
Sponsorship	($17,000)				$140,000	$145,000	$99,899
Federal Grants	$688,000		$471,000	$2,527,000	$182,000	$410,000	$1,191,533
Contribution from Sound Transit[17]	$5,000,000	$5,000,000	$5,000,000				
Miscellaneous Revenue	$4,000	$60,000	$111,000	$56,000	$227,000	$10,000	$677,314
Operating Transfer In[18]	$3,613,000	$3,529,000	$3,647,000	$3,435,000	$6,120,000	$8,160,000	$8,959,823
Total Revenue	**$9,288,000**	**$8,589,000**	**$9,229,000**	**$6,018,000**	**$6,669,000**	**$8,725,000**	**$10,928,568**

Expenditures	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Adopted Budget 2026	Projected 2026
Metro Gross[19]	$8,811,000	$7,852,000	$8,862,000	$9,924,000	$9,783,000	$9,710,426	$9,847,707
Fare Revenue - ORCA	($263,000)	($369,000)	($437,000)	($442,000)	($652,000)	($584,000)	($672,000)
Federal Grant Credits	($1,030,000)	($1,331,000)					
Risk Recovery Credit					($4,000)		
Metro Net	$7,518,000	$6,152,000	$8,425,000	$9,482,000	$9,131,000	$8,743,000	$9,341,000
Total Expenditures	**$8,259,000**	**$7,067,000**	**$9,170,000**	**$10,398,000**	**$9,976,000**	**$9,757,014**	**$10,925,976**

[17]The Sound Transit contribution to FHS of $5 million annually concluded in 2023.
[18]See note 14.
[19]See note 15 and King County Metro reconciliation credit from 2025 of $279 thousand deducted from 2026 Metro Gross costs.

Table 6: First Hill Projected Funding and Expenses

Revenues	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Sponsorship	$145,000	$142,000	$151,000	$154,000	$155,000
Federal Grants	$424,024	$438,866	$1,024,000	$425,000	$435,000
Miscellaneous Revenue	$10,000	$10,000	$10,000	$10,000	$10,000
Operating Transfer In[20]	$8,480,400	$8,766,107	$8,966,400	$9,771,600	$10,651,044
Total Revenue	**$9,059,424**	**$9,356,973**	**$10,151,400**	**$10,360,600**	**$11,251,044**

Expenditures	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
SDOT[21]	$596,465	$617,341	$1,024,000	$1,063,000	$1,102,000
Metro Gross	$10,194,045	$10,547,617	$10,921,000	$11,565,000	$12,226,000
Fare Revenue - ORCA	($692,000)	($713,000)	($727,000)	($831,000)	($923,000)
Metro Net	$9,194,000	$9,681,000	$10,194,000	$10,734,000	$11,303,000
Total Expenditures	**$10,098,510**	**$10,451,958**	**$11,218,000**	**$11,797,000**	**$12,405,000**

Table 7: First Hill Streetcar Performance Historic and Estimated

[20] See note 14

[21] 2027-28 Streetcar Battery Replacement project of $6.4 million is budgeted under capital project MC-TR-C117 - First Hill Streetcar Replacement and Repair. It is funded by the Transportation Benefit District Fund and isn't passing through the Streetcar Fund.

	Actuals						Projected				
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Ridership	660,029	698,975	937,394	1,175,767	1,269,768	1,344,381	1,384,712	1,426,254	1,469,041	1,513,113	1,558,506
Farebox Recovery Ratio	3%	3%	4%	5%	4%	7%	7%	7%	7%	7%	7%
Productivity	31	29	38	48	52	55	56	58	60	62	64
"Fare Evasion"	23%	69%	68%	69%	71%	62%	62%	62%	62%	62%	62%
Reliability (On-Time Performance)	63%	83%	87%	83%	80%	82%	82%	82%	82%	82%	82%

Table 8: South Lake Union Performance Historical and Estimated

	Actuals						Projected				
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Ridership	89,414	107,145	180,211	236,121	245,440	280,106	336,127	403,353	484,023	498,544	513,500
Farebox Recovery Ratio	5%	4%	7%	9%	6%	7%	7%	7%	7%	7%	7%
Productivity	11	9	14	19	18	21	25	31	37	38	39
"Fare Evasion"	3%	11%	16%	40%	16%	27%	26%	25%	25%	25%	25%
Reliability (On-Time Performance)	46%	48%	65%	61%	56%	45%	45%	45%	45%	45%	45%

SPONSORSHIP

The sponsorship program is managed by Intersection, an advertising agency that also works with other transit agencies including King County Metro and Sound Transit.

As the contract cycle begins in March, SDOT receives payment for each year's sales at the end of the annual term. The 2025 earned revenue from March 2025 to March 2024 was $166,498, a 29% decrease from 2024 revenue of $233,796. South Lake Union vehicles, which are the largest driver of sales revenue, were in process of receiving midlife overhauls throughout 2025 and were less available for sponsorship wraps contributing to the decrease in revenue. Due to when the contract was executed and the payment structure noted above, 2024 revenue will be shown in the 2025 Operations Report financial tables (where 2025 revenue will be reflected in 2026).

5.4 Operating Contributions

Metro contributions to the SLU line continued to be the largest source of external streetcar funding in 2025. The Metro contribution to SLU of $1.55 million annually, with slight increases each year, continued under the Interlocal Agreement (ILA) through 2024. In 2024, SDOT renegotiated the operating ILA with Metro to include a financial commitment of $1.7 million annually through 2029 with no yearly increases. The Sound Transit contribution to FHS of $5.0 million annually concluded in 2023. 2024 was the last year for the Amazon operating contribution to the SLU line.

GRANT FUNDING

During 2020 and 2021, federal relief funds totaling almost $2.7 million for the COVID-19 pandemic provided significant financial support for streetcar operations. The final relief funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) (a COVID-19 stimulus package) were disbursed in 2024 for 2022 expenses. Additionally, SDOT received credits from King County Metro's COVID-19 pandemic relief funding totaling almost $4.4 million, reducing streetcar operating costs from 2020 through 2022. In 2025, SDOT received $426,000 in Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funding for streetcar preventative maintenance.

Detailed financial metrics, including historic and projected funding sources, can be found in Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6. Actuals in these tables show costs credited against Metro invoices such as ORCA fare revenue, federal grant credits, or Metro operating contributions.

Conclusion

2025 IN REVIEW

Streetcar had a strong year in 2025, with significant improvements to fare programs, safety, and system integration. The Seattle Streetcar experienced meaningful ridership and fare revenue growth in 2025, compared to 2024.

- Systemwide, the Seattle Streetcar ridership increased by 9% in 2025 (1,624,487) compared to 2024 (1,492,360).
- Streetcar fare revenue increased 35% in 2025 compared to 2024.

In 2025, Seattle Streetcar made big changes to fares and connectivity by permanently adopting ORCA LIFT fares, participating in the Human Service ORCA pilot, and syncing up fares with Metro and Sound Transit. The streetcar safety program continued to mature, by beginning fare enforcement in line with Metro, establishing Metro Transit Police as the primary law enforcement agency for Seattle Streetcar, and responding to new federal requirements.

Seattle Streetcar delivered a standout year in 2025, marked by major leaps in fare programs, safety, and system integration. Ridership and fare revenue both saw growth, underscoring a system that is becoming more connected, more accessible, and more customer focused.

Key Highlights

- Ridership climbed 9% systemwide in 2025, reaching 1,624,487 rides.
- Fare revenue surged by 35% compared to 2024 — a significant boost that reflects both higher ridership and more seamless fare options.
- Permanent adoption of ORCA LIFT fares expanded affordability for riders across the network.
- Participation in the Human Service ORCA pilot increased access for riders with the greatest mobility needs.
- Fare alignment with Metro and Sound Transit improved systemwide consistency and reduced friction for customers transferring between services.
- Safety advancements included launching fare enforcement aligned with Metro, designating Metro Transit Police as the primary law enforcement partner, and proactively meeting new federal requirements.

Together, these changes helped position Seattle Streetcar as a more integrated, more equitable, and more reliable part of the regional transit network.

LOOKING AHEAD

As shown in 2025 data, the Seattle Streetcar continues to be a vital transportation system connector, and SDOT is gearing up for an ambitious year in 2026 of stewardship, improvement, and preparation across the entire streetcar program.

Key Focus Areas for 2026

- **System performance and safety:** Partnering closely with the Transit Spot Improvement Program to deliver targeted safety and operational upgrades on both lines.
- **FIFA World Cup Service:** Seattle Streetcar is planning to provide extra service on the First Hill Streetcar line during World Cup match days, and refresh streetcar shelters throughout the system.
- **System stewardship:** Proactively maintaining and reinvesting in an aging system to ensure service remains safe, reliable, and appealing. This includes:
  - Evaluating options to overhaul First Hill Streetcar batteries to protect service levels.
  - Installing new real time tracking and automatic passenger counters—standardizing equipment with Metro bus for a more seamless customer experience.
- **Rider safety and security:** Continuing to reduce onboard and platform security incidents through partnership with King County Metro Transit Police and Metro security.
- **Fare Payment:** Continue to provide consistent fare enforcement practices and expand options for riders to pay their fares through "Tap to Pay", decreasing fare evasion rates and increasing farebox recovery.
- **Accessibility and affordability:** Expanding access by supporting Metro's low income fare programs, including the Human Service Bus Ticket ORCA pilot.
- **Federal safety regulations:** Maintaining compliance with new requirements stemming from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and updated roadway worker protection rules.
- **Link Light Rail extensions:** Collaborating with Sound Transit on mitigation planning for the Ballard Link Extension, which may introduce significant operational impacts to both the South Lake Union and First Hill lines.

These efforts position Seattle Streetcar for another year of growth, resilience, and stronger integration with the region's expanding transit network.

Appendix: Chart Captions

Figure 1: Map of Seattle Streetcar System

This map shows the two existing streetcar lines (South Lake Union and First Hill). The South Lake Union line connects downtown to South Lake Union. The First Hill line connects the Pioneer Square, Chinatown-International District, Central District, Yesler Terrace, First Hill, and Capitol Hill neighborhoods. The map shows a dotted line where the future Culture Connector path is along First Avenue.

Figure 2: Seattle Streetcar Safety Events January 2020-December 2025

This chart shows Streetcar safety events, including fatalities, injuries, safety events that were emergency handle pulls, preventable collisions, on-the-job injuries, and other safety events (that were not covered in the other categories) from 2020-2025. The chart shows that there were zero fatalities and few injuries during this period (with no injuries from 2022-2024). In 2025 there were fewer safety events while preventable collisions and on the job injuries showed no increase compared to 2024.

Figure 3: Seattle Streetcar Security Incidents January 2020-December 2025

This chart shows Streetcar security incidents from 2020-2025. These incidents include drug use, alcohol use, harassment/threats, passenger physical disturbance, physical assault, property damage/graffiti, sanitation events (urinating, etc.), and unlawful transit conduct. The chart shows that in 2025; the number of security incidents was lower than 2024 in most areas. Most of these incidents were graffiti on streetcar shelters and vehicles, with the second highest reported incident being drug usage. While drug usage was higher in 2025 than in 2024 on streetcar vehicles and shelters, it was still relatively low compared to other incidents.

Figure 4: Seattle Streetcar Ridership (National Transit Database Reported) 2019-2024

This chart shows ridership for both the South Lake Union and First Hill Streetcar lines from 2019 to 2025. The chart shows the drop in ridership for both lines during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and that ridership has been steadily increasing for both lines since 2021.

Figure 5: Seattle Streetcar On-Time Performance 2019-2025

This chart shows on-time performance for both the South Lake Union and First Hill Streetcar lines from 2019 to 2025. This chart shows that reliability decreased from 56% to 45% for South Lake Union and increased from 80% to 82% for First Hill.

Figure 6: Seattle Streetcar Productivity 2019-2025

This chart shows streetcar productivity for both the South Lake Union and First Hill Streetcar lines from 2019 to 2025. Productivity is the number of riders in a vehicle during an hour in service. This chart shows that productivity increased from 52 to 55 for First Hill and increased from 18 to 21 for South Lake Union in 2025.

Figure 7: Fare Revenue Collected 2019-2025

This chart shows streetcar fare revenue collected for both the South Lake Union and First Hill Streetcar lines from 2019 to 2025. Overall fare revenue increased by 35% in 2025 compared to 2024. This large increase is due to several factors including beginning fare enforcement in 2025, increasing streetcar ridership, and a fare change to $3 from $2.25.

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