

## Key Facts about Sound Transit

December 2011

### Sound Transit Taxing Authority and Funding

- 0.3% Motor Vehicle Excise Tax
- 0.9% Sales Tax

### 2010 Total Agency Revenue

Fare Revenue	(14%)	\$37,589,007
Local Funds	(77%)	\$207,427,417
State Funds	(0%)	\$0
Federal Funds	(0%)	\$556,041
Other	(9%)	\$23,894,846

### 2010 Agency Expenses

2010 Total Agency Operating Expenses	\$269,467,311
2010 Total Agency Capital Expenses	\$515,439,510
2010 Total Agency Expenses	\$784,906,821
1999–2010 Cumulative Capital Expenses	\$5,410,860,482
1999–2010 Cumulative Capital Expenses, Light Rail only	\$3,281,339,723

### Sound Transit Light Rail Performance Comparisons

2010	Vehicles Operated in Maximum Service	Fare Revenues	Capital Expenses
Sound Transit Light Rail	28	\$9,608,740	\$339,251,219
King County Metro Buses	962	\$110,713,902	\$78,878,745

Source: 2010 National Transit Database

2010	Operating Expenses	Annual Unlinked Trips	Operating Cost per Trip
Sound Transit Light Rail	\$44,477,410	7,831,905	\$5.68
National Light Rail	\$1,498,800,000	456,400,000	\$3.30
King County Metro Buses	\$386,849,663	88,287,797	\$4.38

Source: 2010 National Transit Database

2010	Annual Public Subsidy Required, Operating Only	Annual Farebox Recovery Rate	Operating Subsidy per Trip
Sound Transit Light Rail	\$34,868,670	21.60%	\$4.45
National Light Rail	\$1,077,100,000	28.14%	\$2.36
King County Metro Buses	\$276,135,761	28.62%	\$3.13

*Source: 2010 National Transit Database*

New research released by Washington Policy Center, a non-partisan, public-policy think tank with offices in Seattle, Olympia, and Eastern Washington, provides key facts about the performance of Sound Transit's light rail system.

In 1996, voters approved the first phase of Sound Transit's light rail program and in 2009, officials opened the initial segment between Sea-Tac Airport and downtown Seattle.

The poor performance of Sound Transit officials to deliver what they originally promised to voters has been well documented.<sup>1</sup> Officials said the main light rail system would carry 105,000 trips per day by 2010.<sup>2</sup> Today in 2011, light rail only carries about 24,000 trips per day, a fraction of what officials first estimated.<sup>3</sup> To put this in perspective, 24,000 trips is about half the vehicle demand that a single lane on I-5 can carry in a day.

Voters also approved a second phase in 2008, which would expand light rail south of the airport, north of the University of Washington, and east to Bellevue. During the election, Sound Transit officials told voters the expanded rail portion (137 miles of light rail and commuter rail) would carry 310,000 passenger trips per day by 2030.<sup>4</sup> The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) recently adopted its regional long range plan called Transportation 2040. In this plan, PSRC officials estimate the region will build about 164 miles of passenger rail by 2040.<sup>5</sup> Yet, this larger rail system will only carry about 164,400 passenger trips per day.<sup>6</sup>

According to PSRC officials, this means the regional passenger rail system will be 20 percent larger, but carry 47 percent fewer people than what Sound Transit officials told voters.

Sound Transit officials also continue to revise downward their ridership estimates. In 1996, officials said its entire light rail system would carry 107,000 trips per day by 2010.<sup>7</sup> In 2006, officials ratcheted down the estimate to 35,821 trips per day by 2010.<sup>8</sup> And in 2009, officials said light rail would carry 29,467 trips per day.<sup>9</sup> Obviously, not even the new projections were accurate.

As the Puget Sound region enters its third full year with light rail, a fuller picture is emerging on its actual performance.

Sound Transit's light rail spending totaled about \$383 million in 2010, or slightly more than \$1 million per day. Sound Transit's light rail system only carried about 7.8 million trips in 2010, which was about 14% less than the agency's most recent revised annual ridership target. Only about 0.2% of the estimated 14 million daily person trips in the Puget Sound region are on light rail, all for about \$3 billion.

Sound Transit's light rail system operates at \$5.68 per passenger trip. This is higher than the national average (\$3.30 per trip) and higher than King County's bus system (\$4.38 per trip). Sound Transit's light rail system also performs poorly with its farebox recovery rates and its public subsidy per trip, both higher than the national average. Sound Transit loses \$4.45 per passenger trip on light rail, while nationally, light rail systems lose an average of \$2.36 per passenger trip.

<sup>1</sup> "Policy Guide, Chapter 10, Transportation," Washington Policy Center, 2008, pg. 289, at [www.washingtonpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Ch10Transportation.pdf](http://www.washingtonpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Ch10Transportation.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> "Sound Move — The 10-Year Regional Transit System Plan," Sound Transit, May 31, 1996, pg. 48, at <http://globaltelematics.com/pitf/SoundTransit1996SoundMovePlan.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> "Sound Transit Quarterly Ridership Report, Second Quarter 2011 April 1 – June 30," Sound Transit, at [www.soundtransit.org/Documents/pdf/riders\\_news/ridership/2011\\_Q2.pdf](http://www.soundtransit.org/Documents/pdf/riders_news/ridership/2011_Q2.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> "Mass Transit Guide, The Sound Transit 2 Plan," Sound Transit, 2008, pg. 5, at [www.washingtonpolicy.org/sites/default/files/STInfoMailer10-08.pdf](http://www.washingtonpolicy.org/sites/default/files/STInfoMailer10-08.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> "Transportation 2040, Chapter 4 Transportation," Puget Sound Regional Council, March 2010, pg. 47, at [www.psrc.org/assets/3677/04-Transportation.pdf](http://www.psrc.org/assets/3677/04-Transportation.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pg. 71.

<sup>7</sup> Sound Move — The 10-Year Regional Transit System Plan," Sound Transit, May 31, 1996, pg. 48, at <http://globaltelematics.com/pitf/SoundTransit1996SoundMovePlan.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> "2006 Service Implementation Plan," Sound Transit, April 5, 2006, pg. 72.

<sup>9</sup> "2009 Service Implementation Plan," Sound Transit, May 28, 2009, pg. 121.