

John Niles comment to Sound Transit at the Sound Transit Public Hearing on the Proposed 2022 Budget and Property Tax Levy | Nov. 4, 2021 | 9:30 a.m.

My name is John S Niles. I am a four-decade resident of Seattle, a voter, a taxpayer, an Orca card holder, and a customer of public transit when it serves to take me when and where I need to go that transit goes.

I am here speaking on behalf of the nonprofit citizens' association Smarter Transit, www.smartertransit.org. Smarter Transit is a pro-transit, non-partisan, all volunteer organization. Our mission is to support and advocate for accountable public transportation governance and investments that grow transit, vanpool, carpool ridership, and safe bike and walking routes throughout the Puget Sound region in the most cost-effective way.

While Smarter Transit has many concerns about the spending described in the proposed 2022 agency budget, the ongoing public resources going into the operation and maintenance of the Sounder North commuter rail line running on BNSF tracks, two round trips daily between Everett and Seattle deserves special attention from the Board. This part of the Sounder commuter rail service has become egregious in many ways and should be terminated, via an extraordinary special Board action on the proposed budget as issued for public attention for this hearing.

Smarter Transit is in the process of preparing a recommended draft resolution for the Sound Transit Board that if passed would order the agency to shut down the Sounder North service by eliminating its budget allocations in the proposed spending plan as of January 1, 2022.

The forecast made in 1996 for daily ridership by 2010 was 2,400 to 3,200 boardings daily, and it was on the basis of this predicted ridership that the train was established. The service has never reached half that number in the decades since its opening in 2003, and most recently has only been reaching 360 one-way boarding per day.

Most importantly, shutting down Sounder North is a responsible government action in response to the mandates coming from the COP26 conference on global climate. Lightly loaded passenger trains pulled by diesel locomotives are well documented as pollution emitters and greenhouse gas generators not justified by the train passengers' avoidance of other emitting modes. The Sounder North

passenger loads are down by 90% since the beginning of the Covid pandemic and showing less recovery than any other line of Sound Transit service.

The Sounder North schedule shows that the buses of Sound Transit Regional Express and Community Transit are available substitutes running every day now for travel on journeys served by Sounder North. Sounder North amounts to a wasteful duplication of public transit service.

Cost to taxpayers **for each one-way boarding** of Sounder North trains is now exceeding \$100. As documented by the Public Interest Transportation Forum [several times over the years](#), the high cost per rider on Sounder North compared to bus service makes the train illegal under the requirements of [RCW 81.104.120](#).

Nine years ago, your own Citizen Oversight Panel wrote to the ST Board, “We do believe that accepting the status quo of low ridership and high costs on North Sounder is not acceptable.” Efforts to boost ridership over the past decade have failed. It’s time for the Sound Transit Board to stop spending money on Sounder North and reallocate the resources it consumes to more productive purposes.

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