

Seattle Department of Transportation

2023 ANNUAL STREETCAR OPERATING REPORT



March 2025



Seattle
Department of
Transportation

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1. Executive Summary

For over 15 years, the Seattle Streetcar system has been providing reliable and modern 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 2023.

NOTE: This report reflects the status of the Seattle Streetcar program in 2023. Beyond 2023, there have been updates to the program and SDOT leadership that will be reflected in subsequent reports.

2023 HIGHLIGHTS

Systemwide ridership continued to grow in 2023, exceeding the rate of growth of Metro bus services.

In 2023, there were **1,411,888** riders using the Seattle Streetcar system.

Ridership continued to rebound from the significant declines seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, system ridership was up 26% over 2022, and reached 76% of total pre-pandemic ridership in 2019. This annual growth exceeded the ridership trends of Metro Bus Operations, which increased 18% during the same period.¹ Productivity on the SLU and FHS lines, as measured by riders per revenue hour, also increased significantly in 2023, up 28% compared to 2022.

Fare programs continued equitable access to transit for Seattle Streetcar riders, while fare revenue continued to grow in 2023.

To advance SDOT's mission to provide safe and affordable access to places and opportunities, we renewed existing fare policies in 2023 that continued to expand access to transit and align better with our regional transit partners, such as King County Metro and Sound Transit. We also continued to track the progress of existing fare programs and participated in an ongoing Metro-led evaluation.

¹ As reported in the 2019 and 2023 APTA Public Transportation Ridership Reports, Metro ridership reached 61% of 2019 ridership in 2023. 2022 National Transit Database (NTD) Ridership reports for King County Metro Bus Operations have not been uploaded, and data may slightly differ from that included in NTD reports due to differences in data calculation procedures and in periods of time covered.

Key highlights included:

- **Renewed ORCA LIFT fares at \$1.00** as an extended pilot program through December 2024.
- Streetcar's **Subsidized Annual Pass Program** hit a milestone of 100,000 trips taken in 2023.

These policies have had minimal impact on fare revenue based on preliminary calculations.

Overall, in 2023, there was a 5% increase in fare revenue over 2022. This increase reflects a stabilization from the drastic increase in fare revenues in 2021 and 2022, although fare revenue collection is still decreased by 63% compared to pre-pandemic levels in 2019.

The Streetcar Safety and Security Program continued to expand and increase effectiveness.

- Continued streetcar security presence on streetcars at four hours of contracted service per day.
- 28% decrease in streetcar security incidents in 2023.
- Ongoing operator safety and training programs resulted in no preventable streetcar collisions in 2023. (A preventable collision is one that could have been prevented by better adhering to rules or procedures.)

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

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

- Adding parking lines at Broadway and Fir Street to prevent cars from blocking streetcar tracks.
- Painting cross hatching throughout the SLU alignment to improve streetcar performance and safety.
- Extending the southbound platform at Westlake and 9th Avenue to allow buses (RapidRide, Route 40) and streetcar to serve the stop at the same time.

Completed Delivery Assessment for the Culture Connector Project, providing updated information about the proposed project to connect the two existing streetcar lines.

In late 2023, a Culture Connector Delivery Assessment was completed to update project assumptions, cost estimates, and delivery approaches in 2023.

Contracted with a new vendor to manage the streetcar sponsorship program to increase streetcar revenues and streamline the administration.

In March 2023, the Streetcar Program contracted with a new vendor to manage the streetcar sponsorship program. The vendor has significant experience in selling transit sponsorships and arranged sponsors for streetcar vehicles throughout 2023.

2. 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 the Transportation and Seattle Public 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 Pool 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 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.

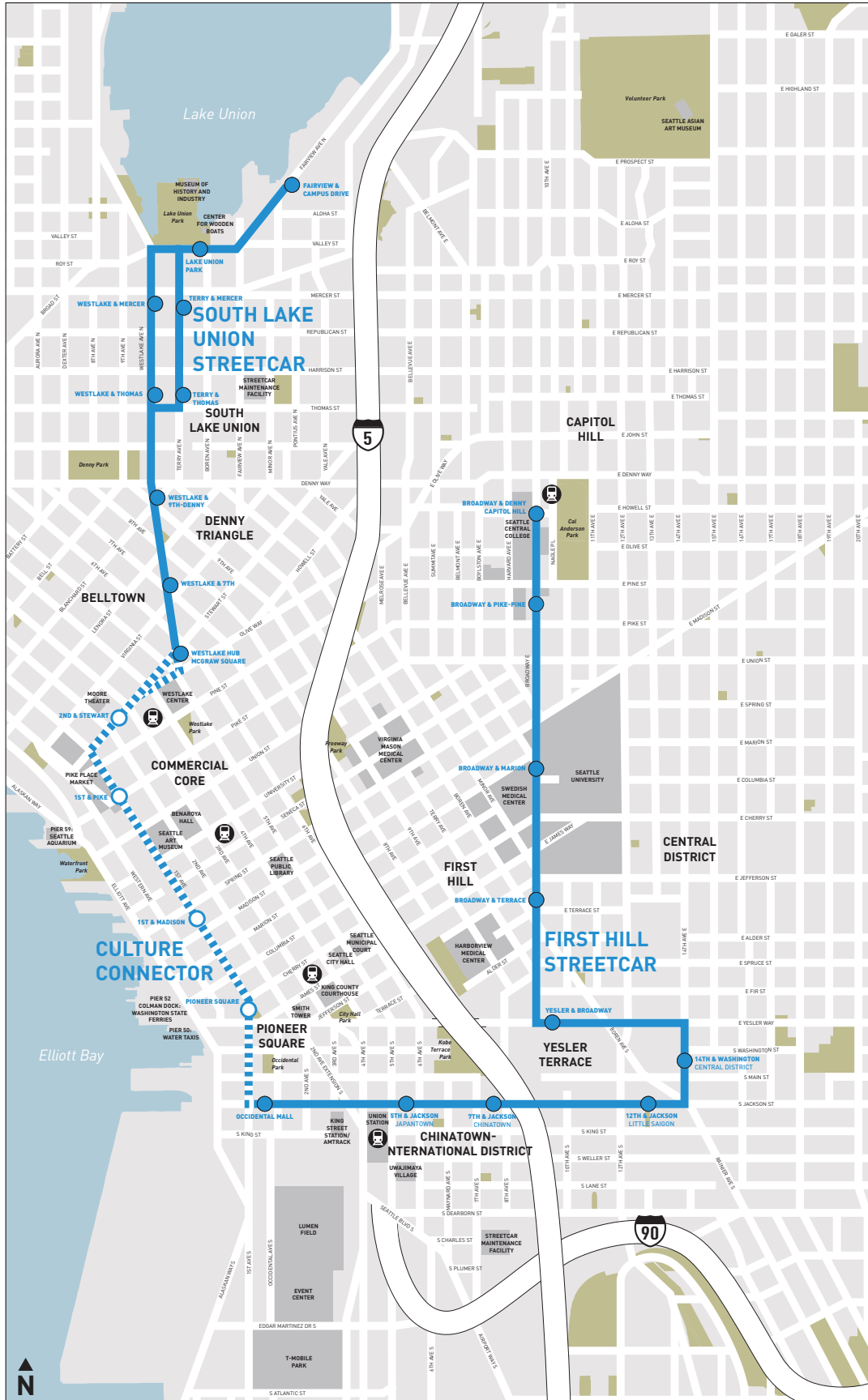
Figure 1 shows the South Lake Union and First Hill Streetcar segment alignments along with the proposed Culture Connector (formerly the Center City Connector or C3 project) route.

2.1. 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 is 1.3 miles long and operates through mixed traffic. The line is served by a fleet of four Inekon 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.

FIGURE 1: SEATTLE STREETCAR SYSTEM MAP



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.

2.2. FIRST HILL STREETCAR

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. It was approved by the Seattle City Council in December 2008. 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. It operates with six streetcar vehicles, 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.

2.3. CULTURE CONNECTOR (FORMERLY CENTER CITY CONNECTOR)²

The Culture Connector (formerly the Center City Connector or C3) is a planned 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 and allow for unified streetcar line. The project is anticipated to be funded through a combination of local and federal funds, including a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Small Starts grant. The project is currently in the FTA Small Starts Project Development process and has a \$50M allocation in the federal Capital Investment Grant (CIG) program. A brief history is provided below.

- From 2012-2018, SDOT designed the Center City Connector project to connect the existing South Lake Union streetcar line with the First Hill Streetcar, which was under construction and opened in 2016. In 2014, Seattle City Council approved the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) and the project was approved for entry into the FTA Small Starts Project Development phase. SDOT successfully designed the project to be ready for bid, worked with funding partners to identify grant funding, and secured environmental approvals from the FTA to advance the project. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the project was issued by FTA in 2017. SDOT also worked with Seattle Public Utilities and Seattle City Light to design a first phase of utility adjustments to accommodate the project, and the first phase of construction is substantially completed.

² During Council's budget discussions in the fall of 2024, Council removed all unsecured funding from the Culture Connector project and no appropriations were included in the 2025-2030 Adopted CIP.

- In March 2018, SDOT paused all work on the project pending an independent review of operating and capital costs led by the City Budget Office. In January 2019, the Durkan Administration announced that the results of the third-party analyses showed that the overall capital cost of the project was significantly higher than the budget passed in 2017.
- In August 2019, the City Council authorized \$9 million in funding for critical design and planning work needed to advance the project. Then-Mayor Durkan also announced plans to work with community members, the City Council, transit partners, businesses, and stakeholders to move forward on the project. In September 2019, the Durkan Administration proposed a new tax on Transportation Network Company (TNC) trips, the proceeds of which can be used as local funding to close the capital budget gap for the project. The City Council approved the new TNC tax in December 2019.
- In June 2020, SDOT paused the project due to significant decline of revenues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The 2022 Budget included \$2.4 million funded by TNC revenues to prepare a delivery assessment to enable SDOT to update key project information and provide analysis to support decision-makers in determining the future of the project. In 2022, amid ongoing financial challenges with TNC revenues post-pandemic, this work was paused.
- Under the Harrell Administration, a newly invigorated concept of the Culture Connector took shape when SDOT Director Greg Spotts joined. SDOT engaged with downtown stakeholders and confirmed there is a strong desire to improve connections and access to the many cultural, dining, and shopping destinations along the existing First Hill and South Lake Union lines and those along First Avenue as outlined in the Mayor's Downtown Activation Plan.
- In 2023, a Culture Connector Delivery Assessment was undertaken to update project assumptions, cost estimates, and delivery approaches. It was released in early 2024 and is available on the [project website](#).

For the purposes of this report, future year projections include only SLU and FHS operations.

3. OPERATIONS HIGHLIGHTS

3.1 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 regarding the Seattle Streetcar. 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.

Metro, as operator of the system, employs approximately 55 operators, supervisors, and maintenance staff dedicated to streetcar operations. 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, 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, Sound Transit contributions³, 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.

3.2 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 FTA'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.

³ Under the Funding and Cooperative Agreement between Sound Transit and the City of Seattle for the First Hill Streetcar project, Sound Transit provides an annual contribution of \$5.0M to First Hill Streetcar operations and maintenance until the end of 2023.

Under these regulations, SDOT now has 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.

In 2021, the federal government passed minor changes to PTASP requirements. Notably, new benchmarks requiring a PTASP approval committee comprised of an even mix of management and front-line labor were added to annual requirements. Each year, this group is required to review the revised PTASP prior to adoption. In 2022,

SDOT worked with King County Metro to identify union-represented members to fill this committee. This committee met three times at the end of 2022 to review and approve the PTASP.

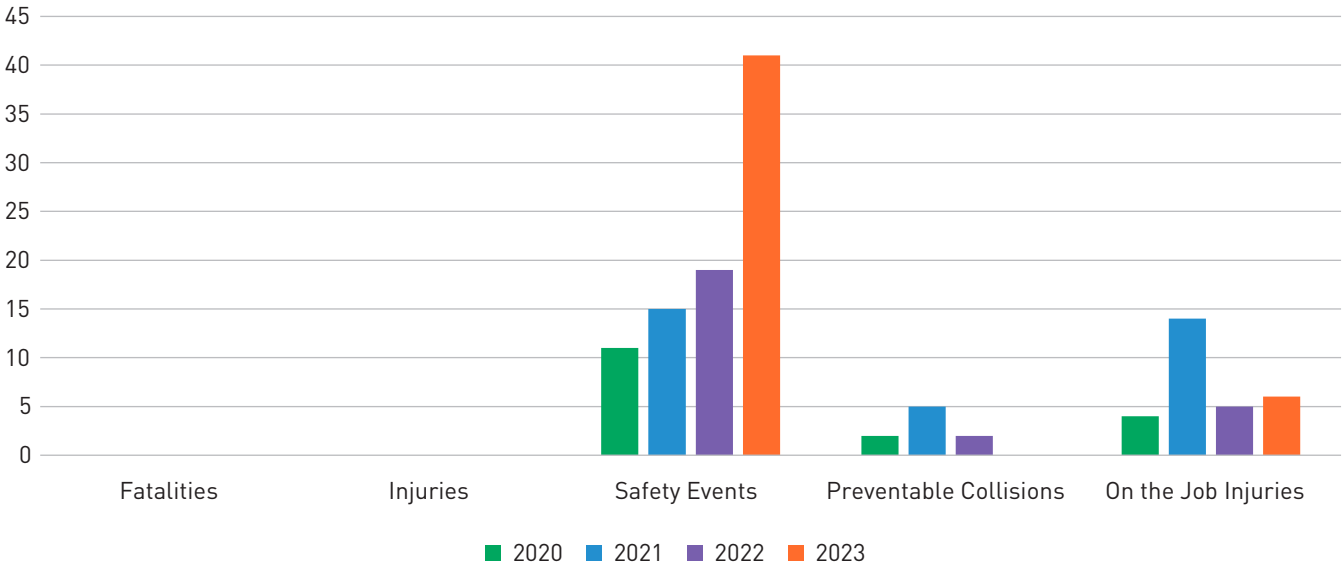
The Streetcar Safety and Security Review Committee (SSRC), a committee comprised of a mix of SDOT and King County Metro employees, designed to effectively address identified hazards, continued to mature in 2023 in addressing complex revisions to the right of way. Among the highlights was a revision to the intersection of Yesler Way & 12th Ave which improved safety for bicyclists travelling northbound on 12th Ave, improved streetcar reliability and streamlined general purpose traffic flow.

3.2.1 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.”

FIGURE 2: SEATTLE STREETCAR SAFETY EVENTS JANUARY 2020 -DECEMBER 2023



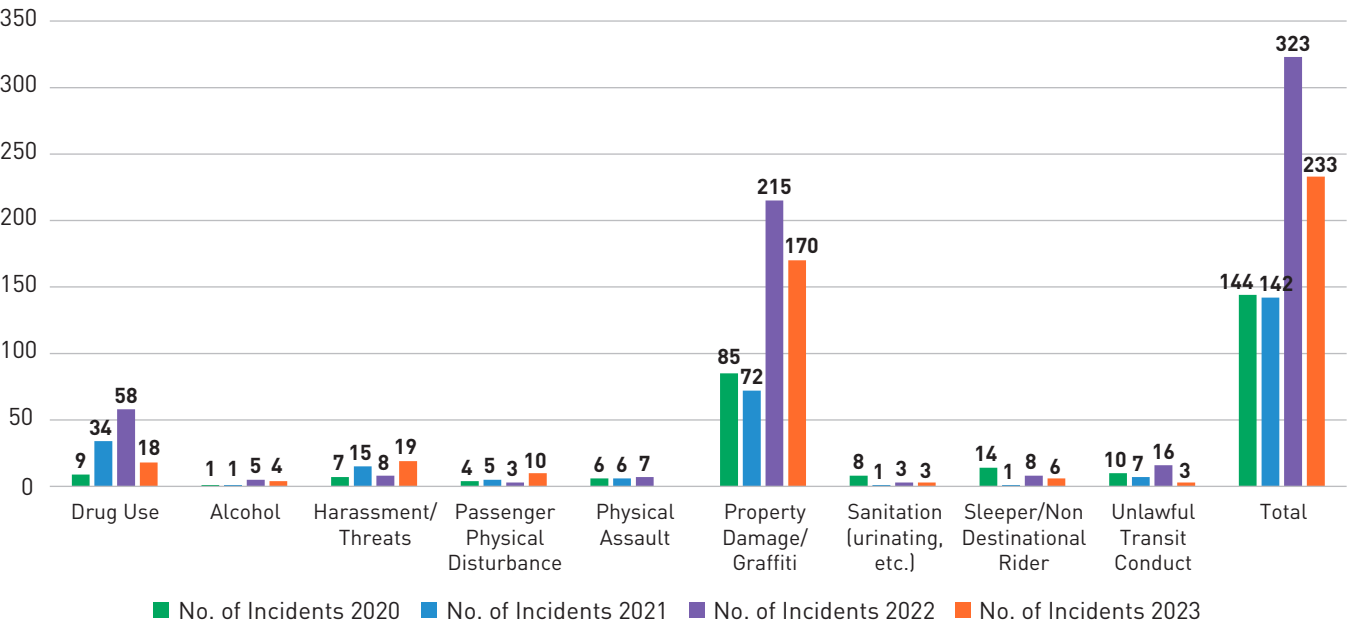
Comparing the overall safety event data for 2022 and 2023, Figure 2 below demonstrates an increase from 19 to 41 events. Preventable collisions and on-the-job injuries, also noted in Figure 2, are included in the total Safety Event data count. This comparison suggests an erosion of safety; however, 23 of the total 41 events were “passenger pulling the emergency handle to exit the streetcar” (emergency evacuation). The remaining safety events suggest an overall safe operational safety record, with the majority of the safety events comprised of minor collisions such as a car running into the back of or side-swiping a streetcar.

Overall, the safety record for the streetcar is considered positive. The absence of preventable collisions indicates a healthy operator training program. “Emergency evacuations” are an issue that staff are focused on reducing. However, most of these events occur when a streetcar becomes stranded in a traffic blockage, and passengers become insistent on getting off the streetcar at a location where a platform is not located.

3.2.2 Security Report

Like many transit agencies, streetcar has seen an increase in security-related incidents on streetcars and platforms since the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2021, SDOT has worked with Metro to deploy privately contracted security personnel on streetcar service. In 2022, SDOT and Metro observed behaviors onboard and on platforms that included verbal abuse, intimidation and physical assault on passengers and employees. Security staff are trained to be customer service representatives first and security de-escalation second with the ability to call on law enforcement in cases where they are required. Fare enforcement is not a component of this deployment. In 2023, the number of security incidents was fewer than 2022 indicating that contracted security personnel are making a difference in terms of total incidents occurring.

FIGURE 3: SEATTLE STREETCAR SECURITY INCIDENTS JANUARY 2020-DECEMBER 2023



Security personnel are scheduled for four hours per day, seven days a week across both lines. 2023 was the first year that security personnel were able to meet this schedule, due to ongoing labor shortages. The implementation of security enforcement is consistent with the Metro Safety, Security, and Fare Enforcement (SaFE) Reform initiative⁴ which guides Metro's deployment of security staff on Metro Bus Operations. This provides consistency between security service on streetcar and bus transit.

Feedback from the public continues to be positive related to the presence of security personnel on board streetcars and at platforms. SDOT requested eight hours per day in the future, contingent on increased recruitment of security personnel.

Figure 3 shows the number and types of reported security incidents from 2020 to 2023. Security incidents are defined by 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."*

Observations of 2023 security incidents indicate significant improvements compared to 2022. Incidents of drug usage and graffiti continue to decline indicating that presence of security personnel is making a difference. Property Damage and Vandalism continues to be the leading type of incident, with a 21% drop compared to 2022 values observed. Drug use was the second leading incident, with a 69% drop observed when compared to 2022 values.

⁴ kingcounty.gov/depts/transportation/metro/about/safety-security/safe-reform-initiative.aspx

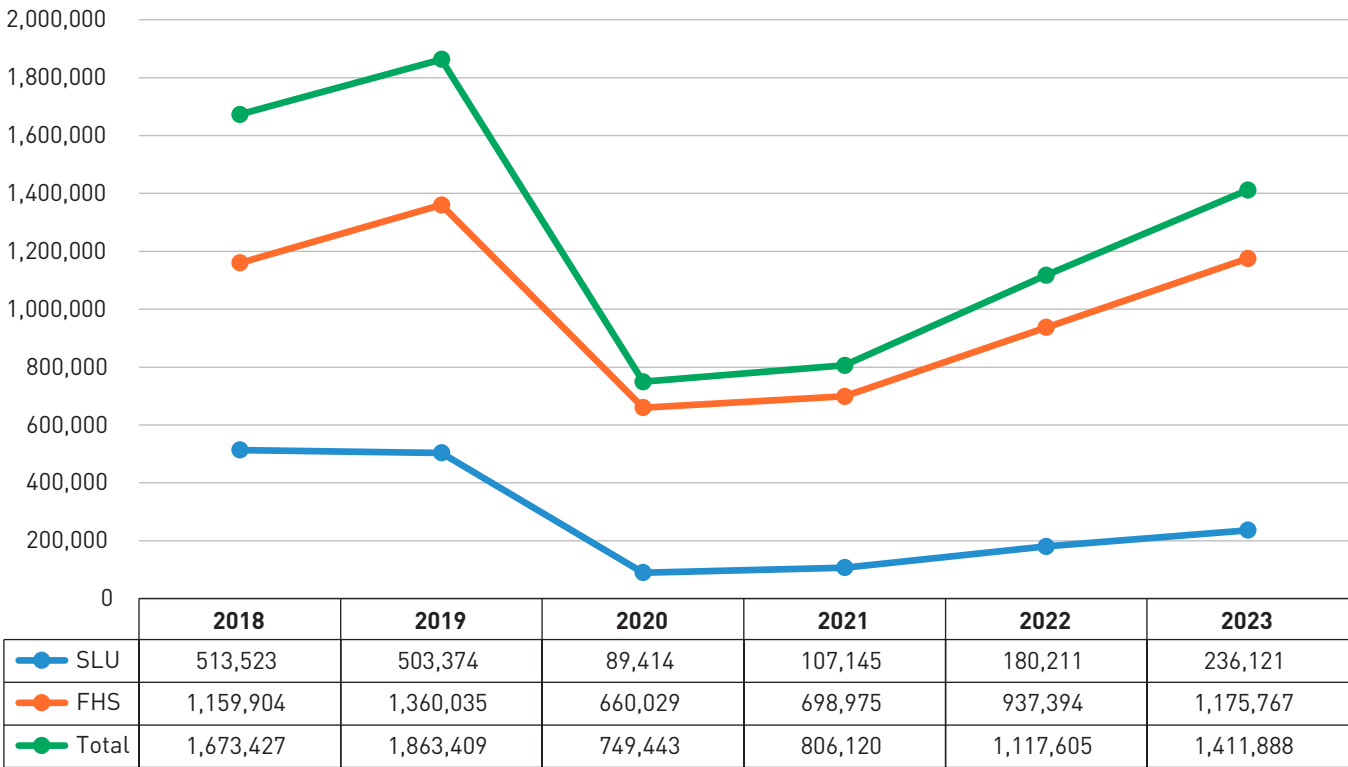
4. Performance Metrics

4.1 RIDERSHIP

Ridership on the Seattle Streetcar system continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic with continuous growth since 2021. Overall, systemwide ridership increased by approximately 26% (approximately 294,282 rides in 2023) compared to 2022. SDOT collects

Streetcar ridership numbers via automatic passenger counters installed onboard vehicles. These numbers are validated by King County Metro before being sent to the National Transit Database (NTD). Ridership trends from 2018 to 2023 are shown in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4: SEATTLE STREETCAR RIDERSHIP (NATIONAL TRANSIT DATA BASE REPORTED) 2017-2023



- 2023 ridership on the First Hill Line⁵ increased by approximately 25% over 2022.
- 2023 ridership on the South Lake Union Line⁶ increased by approximately 31% over 2022.

⁵ As reported by King County Metro to the National Transit Database.
⁶ As reported by King County Metro to the National Transit Database.

TABLE 1: RIDERSHIP ACTUALS AND PROJECTIONS 2019-2028

	Actuals					Projected				
Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
FHS	1,360,035	660,029	698,975	937,394	1,175,767	1,316,859	1,356,365	1,397,056	1,438,967	1,482,136
SLU	503,374	89,414	107,145	180,211	236,121	245,440	283,807	292,321	301,090	310,123
Totals	1,863,409	749,443	806,120	1,117,605	1,411,888	1,562,299	1,640,171	1,689,377	1,740,058	1,792,260

Overall, the streetcar system had a combined systemwide ridership of 1,411,888 riders, which is approximately 76% of pre-pandemic ridership in 2019 (1,863,409). These numbers are higher than the ridership recovery percentages that King County Metro Bus Operations are seeing⁷, with approximately 61% of pre-pandemic ridership.

In years prior, staff assumed 3% year-over-year growth in ridership for projection purposes. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted ridership starting in 2020, making trend analysis from 2020 and beyond challenging.

Based on analysis of data since 2020, combined with ongoing observations, ridership is projected to plateau around 80% of 2019 values, and then increase around 3% annually after that. Ridership is projected to increase by 12% in 2024 for FHS, with 3% year-over-year growth after that. SLU is projected to have 3% year-over-year growth. Based on conversations with Metro staff, Metro Bus Operations are seeing similar trends in rapid post-pandemic growth beginning to plateau.

FHS is projected to reach the 2019 annual baseline by early 2026. SLU is projected to reach the 2019 annual baseline after the current projection period, based on current trends. SLU has seen rapid growth post-pandemic, but due to the line being closed for many months in 2020 and ongoing remote work trends, has seen less overall recovery to 2019 levels.

Actual ridership and updated projections are located within Table 1.

⁷ As reported in the 2019 and 2023 APTA Public Transportation Ridership Reports.

4.2 RELIABILITY

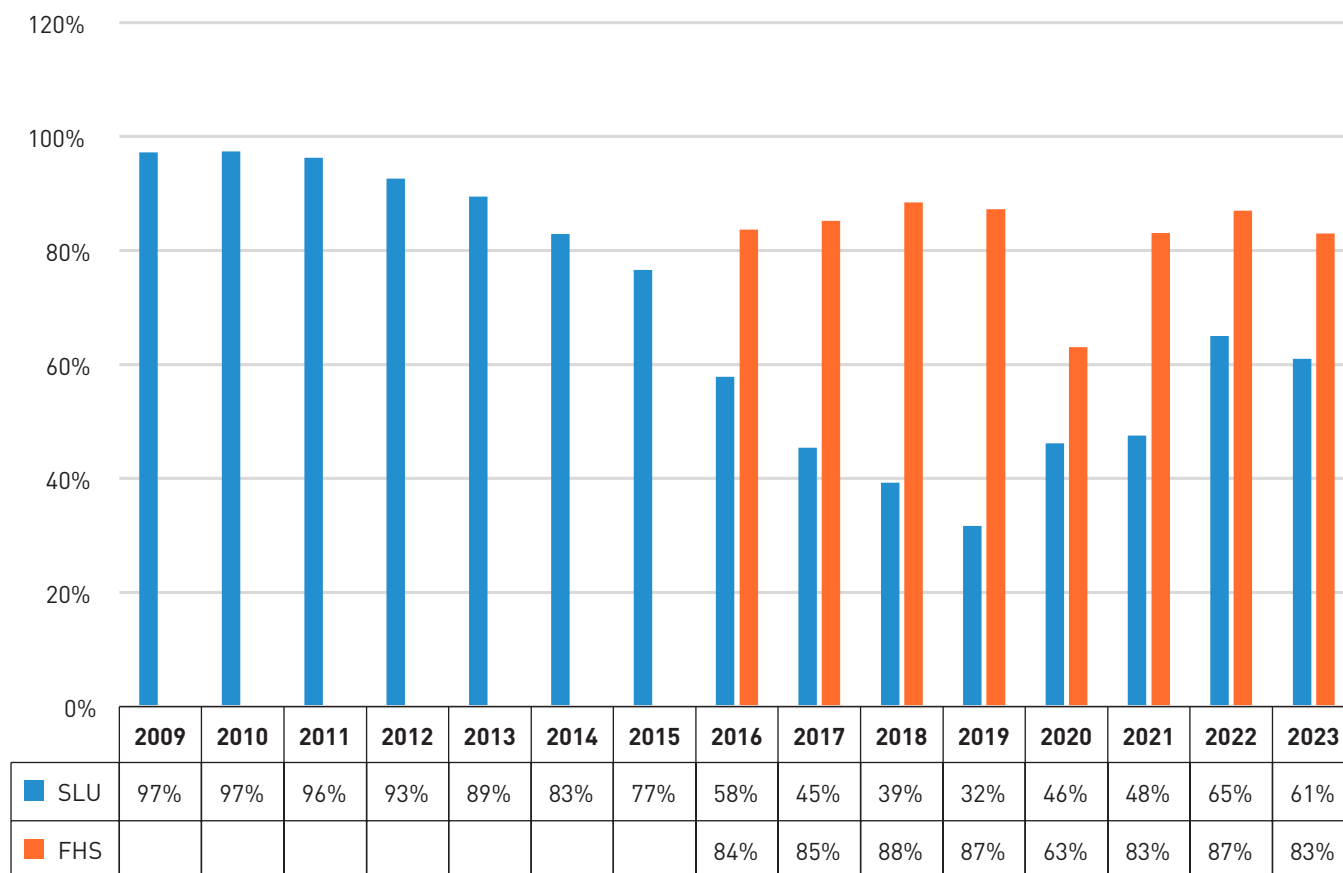
Reliability is measured based on the arrival time of a given streetcar at designated points along the route between 7:00am and 7:00pm, relative to the scheduled arrival time. A streetcar is “on-time” if it arrives within a five-minute window prior to or later than the scheduled time at the designated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

Overall reliability in 2023 slightly decreased for both lines. Reliability for the FHS line slightly decreased in 2023 from 87% to 83%, which is slightly lower than Metro Bus Operations. Reliability on the SLU line decreased slightly from 65% to 61%. Both lines had large increases in reliability after 2020 largely due to pandemic travel tends with slight decreases in 2023 attributed to vehicle trips returning to pre-pandemic levels. In 2022, SDOT switched real time information software from NextBus to Swiftly, which improved the accuracy of streetcar’s reliability data.

In 2023, SDOT also made several capital improvements to improve streetcar reliability along the South Lake Union and First Hill lines. The SDOT Transit Spot Improvement program installed cross hatchings to prevent cars from blocking the streetcar tracks at Fairview Avenue and Harrison Street, and Fairview Avenue and Valley Street, as well as repainted parking lines to prevent parked cars from blocking streetcar tracks at Broadway and East Fir Street. SDOT also initiated a performance analysis study in 2022 for both SLU and FHS that is still ongoing, which will identify other capital projects to improve service reliability and performance.

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

FIGURE 5: SEATTLE STREETCAR ON-TIME PERFORMANCE 2009-2023⁸



⁸ Data begins at 2016 for FHS as that is when revenue service began for the line.

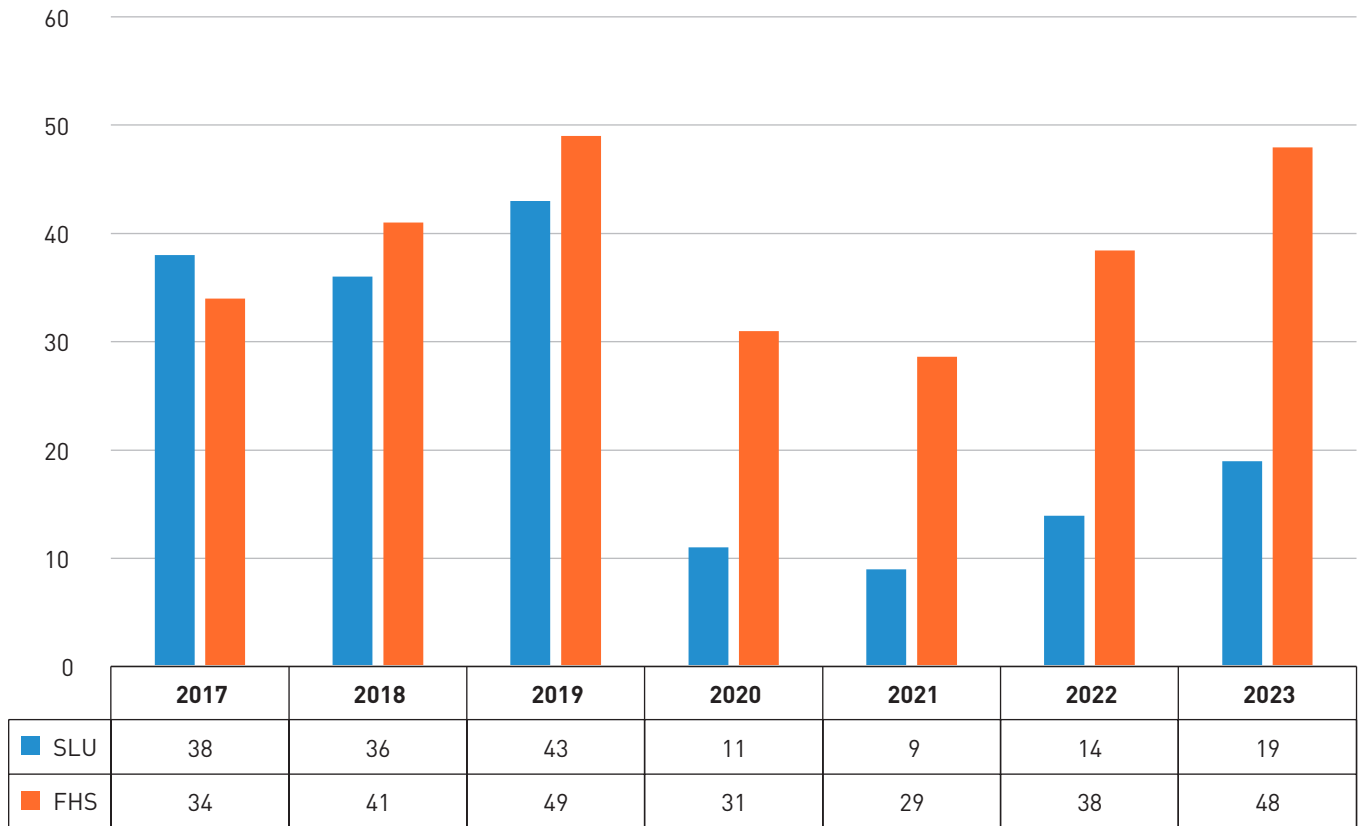
4.3 PRODUCTIVITY

Productivity on the SLU and FHS lines, as measured by riders per revenue hour, increased significantly in 2023. Productivity is measured by calculating the number of riders, compared to the number of hours streetcar is operating scheduled service, or revenue hours⁹. Transit agencies use this indicator to manage service. SLU operated approximately 12,454 revenue hours, serving 19

riders per revenue hour. This is a 36% increase from 2022. FHS operated approximately 24,528 revenue hours, serving 48 riders per revenue hour. This is a 25% increase from 2022 and has almost reached 2019 levels (49 riders per revenue hour). 2023 productivity trends for both FHS and SLU are in line with or higher than Metro Bus productivity. Figure 6 shows the productivity of each line.

⁹ Revenue Hours are defined as the number of hours streetcars are operating scheduled service. This time does not include layover or deadhead time.

FIGURE 6: SEATTLE STREETCAR PRODUCTIVITY 2017-2023



4.4 PERFORMANCE AND SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

In 2023, SDOT continued work on spot improvement projects to improve safety, performance, and reliability for the streetcar. The SDOT Transit Spot Improvement Program completed work on several projects along both lines to increase safety for streetcar operators,

reduce operational conflicts, and improve streetcar travel time and reliability. A platform extension at Westlake and Denny to accommodate streetcars and RapidRide buses was also completed in 2023.

Table 2 outlines the safety improvements locations and dates completed.

TABLE 2: 2023 STREETCAR SPOT IMPROVEMENTS

Location	Project	Date Completed
Fairview Ave and Harrison St	Hatching to prevent vehicles from blocking Streetcar	Q2 2023
Broadway and Fir St	Parking lines to prevent vehicles from blocking Streetcar tracks	Q2 2023
Fairview Ave and Valley St	No Left Turn restriction and hatching marks	Q2 2023
Southbound Westlake Ave and 9th Ave	Expand RapidRide, Bus and Streetcar platform	Q4 2023



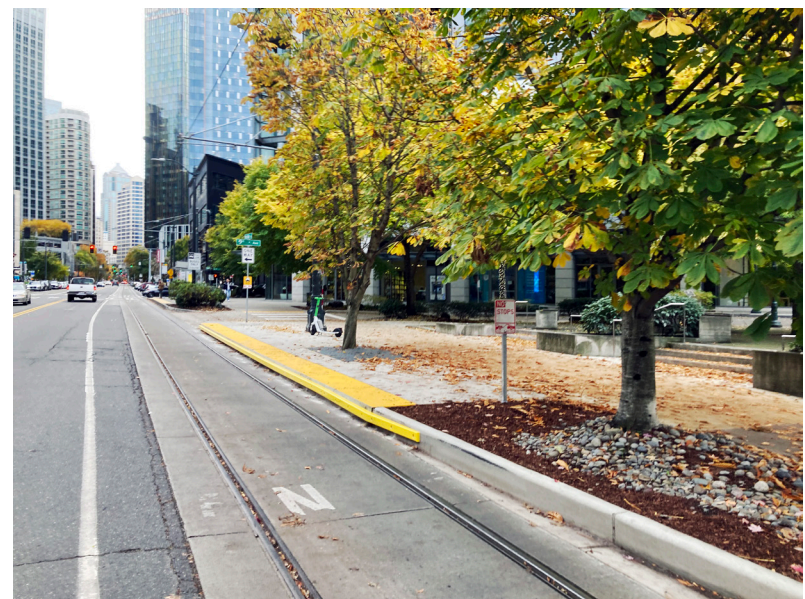
Repainted parking lines at Broadway and Fir



Fairview and Valley hatching at intersection



Fairview and Harrison hatching along tracks



Southbound platform extension at Westlake and 9th

5. Financial Metrics

5.1 OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE COSTS

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted streetcar operations through reduced service hours due to staffing and budget constraints compared to 2019, lower fare revenues, and ongoing asset maintenance challenges such as shelter damage. In 2023, SDOT continued to operate service at reduced level (compared to 2019 service levels).

- For First Hill, there is a reduced span of service (ending at 10:30 PM instead of 1:00 AM) and service levels of every 15 minutes instead of every 10–12 minutes.
- For South Lake Union, there is a reduced span of service (ending at 9:00 PM most days, instead of 11:00 PM) and service levels of every 15 minutes most of the day plus added peak trips, instead of every 10–12 minutes.

Asset maintenance challenges such as streetcar shelter and vehicle damage due to vandalism continued to be an issue in 2023 but decreased by 21% compared to 2022 (per 2023 Streetcar security incident data). While both streetcar lines experienced incidents of vandalism, the FHS line continued to experience higher levels. The most common form of vandalism was graffiti and broken glass on streetcar shelters. In 2021, streetcar staff piloted using polycarbonate at shelters, instead of glass, and expanded use of this material throughout 2022 and 2023. While polycarbonate is a more expensive material than glass, it is far more resilient to damage. From preliminary calculations, polycarbonate appears to be a lower cost option long-term, with reduced costs from ordering glass and installing graphics less often. Other higher cost asset maintenance costs in 2023 were increased overhead wire maintenance costs due to King County Metro staffing limitations (and resulting overtime costs), converting SLU

lighting to be LED compatible, and costs for adding additional streetcar shelter lighting throughout the system (which will be installed in 2024), fulfilling one of SDOT's Transportation Equity Framework tactics (Tactic 45.1).

Systemwide, in 2023, operations and maintenance costs for the Seattle Streetcar increased by 16%, due to adding an electro-mechanic position, purchasing parts needed for mid-life vehicle overhauls, and increasing streetcar security levels. SDOT does not see all operation and maintenance costs as expenses in SDOT's accounting system, as King County Metro credits some revenues against invoices. Actual expenses paid by SDOT in 2023 increased by 46% compared to 2022. This is due to the large amount of the remaining federal relief credits that were applied to Metro invoices in 2022 and were no longer available in 2023. Actual costs incurred in SDOT's accounting system are offset by federal relief dollars, ORCA fare revenue, and Metro operating contributions.

In 2024, SDOT will begin billing the \$1.2 million from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) for 2022 and 2023 streetcar operations expenses, which will continue to provide relief from lost fare revenue. ARPA will have a significant impact in offsetting expenses from 2023.

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 KCM Operating Invoices and are not directly received through SDOT's accounting system.

5.2 FUNDING

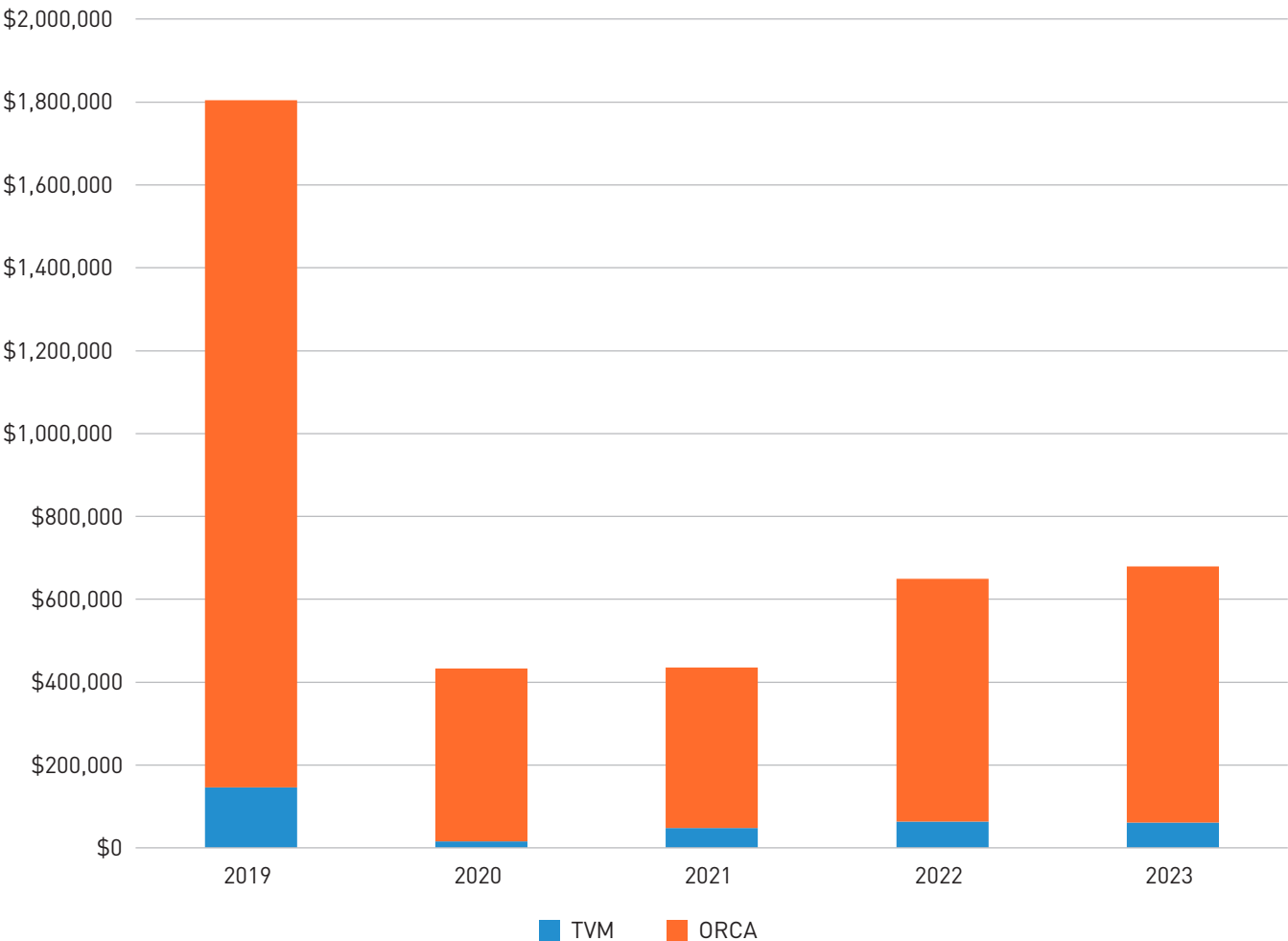
Public transit systems require revenue sources outside of fare revenue to meet operating and maintenance expenses. In 2023, the Seattle Streetcar revenue sources included fare revenue (through ORCA and ticket vending machine sales), sponsorships, contributions from King County Metro and Sound Transit, Seattle Transit Measure, Amazon, and grants. The city also invests other transportation revenues, such as Commercial Parking Tax and Seattle Transit Measure funding (in 2023), to fund streetcar service. These revenues are noted in the Operating Transfer In section of tables 3, 4, 5, and 6.

5.2.1 Fare Revenue

Overall, fare revenue increased 5% in 2023 compared to 2022. ORCA fare revenue saw 5% growth in 2023, compared to 2022. This is likely due to the stable increase in streetcar ridership and ORCA card usage across both lines. Streetcar ticket vending machines (TVMs), which sell streetcar-only tickets, saw a slight decrease of 3% which could be due to several factors such as free youth fares, which do not require a purchased ticket.

A detailed outline of both ticket vending machine and ORCA fare sales can be found in Figure 7.

FIGURE 7: FARE REVENUE COLLECTED 2019-2023



5.2.1.1 Fare Policies

In 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 zero-dollar fares for streetcar passengers 18 and under as part of a 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 that expanded equitable access, included lowering the ORCA LIFT fare from \$1.50 to \$1.00 on a pilot basis starting September 2022, which was consistent with Metro and Sound Transit. In 2023, this pilot was renewed until December 2024. As the Seattle Streetcar is a Metro-operated service and included in the ORCA system, renewing these programs ensured that low-income streetcar passengers aren't disproportionately impacted by these changes. Without a \$1.00 ORCA LIFT fare change or subsidized annual pass renewal, low-income passengers would have needed to load extra funds onto their ORCA cards to transfer to streetcar from other modes.

SDOT analyzed the fare revenue impact of all these programs and has found the financial impact to not be significant. The Subsidized Annual Pass Program resulted in \$26,295 in foregone revenue in 2023. The ongoing ORCA LIFT fare reduction to \$1.00 and the free Youth Fare Adoption in September 2022 appear to have minimal impact on foregone fare revenue as well (~\$2,869 for ORCA LIFT, and ~\$13,540 for youth fares in 2023).

Overall, the reduced fare programs enrollment is continuing to grow in the region, with 29% more transit riders regionwide enrolling in ORCA LIFT in 2023 compared to 2022, and 13% more riders enrolling in Subsidized Annual Pass in 2023 compared to 2022. Streetcar also saw a large increase in ORCA LIFT (47%) riders and Subsidized Annual Pass (15%) riders in 2023 compared to 2022. Streetcar recently hit a milestone of over 100,000 subsidized annual pass trips taken.

SDOT continues to monitor the impact of these fare programs through reviewing Metro data on enrollment and revenue impacts, as well as participating in multi-agency coordination meetings with those participating in these fare programs.

5.2.1.2 Farebox Recovery and Fare Evasion

Fare revenue increased in 2023 (5%) compared to 2022. Total fare revenue per boarding on streetcar slightly decreased in 2023, averaging \$0.48, compared to \$0.58 in 2022. This is likely due to the minimal fare growth compared to a larger increase in ridership.

Fare evasion is the percentage of riders who do not purchase or possess the fare media required to travel. There is no active fare enforcement on the Seattle Streetcar system, and Streetcar Operation Supervisors have paused conducting fare inspection surveys on both streetcar lines since March 2020.

Since the 2021 Annual Report, SDOT implemented a new method to calculate the evasion rate more directly than in past years. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, supervisors conducted fare surveys for one hour per day, resulting in calculations based on a sample size that may have underestimated the amount of non-payment by riders. In this report, fare evasion data is calculated using ORCA and ticket vending machine fare transactions compared to National Transit Database (NTD) validated passenger unlinked trip data¹⁰. This comparison shows the percentage of fare-paying passengers, compared to all passengers.

¹⁰ Unlinked Passenger Trips is the number of times passengers board public transportation vehicles.

Based on this data, overall, the rate of non-payment system-wide increased slightly to 64% in 2023, compared to 60% in 2022. The rate of non-payment for FHS increased slightly in 2023 to 69%, compared to 68% in 2022. The rate of non-payment for SLU increased to 40% in 2023, compared to 16% in 2022. For comparison, Sound Transit's fare evasion rate was 45% in 2023. Streetcar's overall fare evasion rates could also be increasing due to the adoption of free youth fares in September 2022 and associated low levels of ORCA tapping. The high SLU fare evasion rate increase could be due to the continued increase in ridership in 2023 with continued lower rates of ORCA tapping. Streetcar passengers using institution-paid ORCA Passport continue to be the largest contributors to fare revenue. In 2024, Streetcar Program staff will be launching a marketing campaign to both promote the SLU Streetcar enroll more SLU businesses in ORCA Business Accounts.

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 2023, systemwide, farebox recovery ratios increased to 6% from 5% in 2022. The farebox recovery ratios for FHS and SLU were approximately 5% and 9%, respectively. In 2022, farebox recovery ratios for FHS and SLU were approximately 7% and 4%, respectively.

By comparison, in 2022 Sound Transit Link Light Rail farebox recovery rate was reported at 15%, and King County Metro bus, trolley bus, and DART service recovery rate was reported at 9%¹¹. These figures compare to 20% (ST) and 12% (King County) respectively for 2019 and demonstrate the dramatic loss of farebox revenue for transit agencies in the region. Farebox recovery per line is outlined in Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

¹¹ 2023 NTD-reported farebox recovery ratios for Sound Transit and King County were not yet available.

TABLE 3: SOUTH LAKE UNION HISTORIC AND CURRENT OPERATING FUNDING AND EXPENDITURES

	Historical					Adopted Budget	Projected
Revenue	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2024
SDOT							
Fare Revenue - TVM ¹²	\$942,934	\$168,758	\$46,652	\$60,899	\$59,690		\$66,000
Lease Revenue	\$89,340	\$89,340	[\$89,340]				
Sponsorship	\$211,723	\$85,219	\$86,207	\$108,250		\$176,000	\$42,951
Federal Grants	\$97,573	\$704,518		\$314,122		\$146,215	\$2,594,800
Contribution from Metro ¹³	\$1,550,000	\$1,550,000					
Other Revenue - Amazon	\$237,000	\$245,000	\$266,640	\$264,296	\$280,750	\$282,000	\$282,000
Operating Transfer In ¹⁴	\$2,159,474	\$1,668,622	\$1,683,238	\$1,737,943	\$1,878,905	\$3,265,339	\$3,265,339
Total Revenue	\$5,288,044	\$4,511,457	\$1,993,397	\$2,485,510	\$2,219,345	\$3,869,554	\$6,251,090
Expenditures							
SDOT	\$377,237	\$313,194	\$487,839	\$530,830	\$647,811	\$529,962	\$635,000
Metro Gross ¹⁵	\$4,645,140	\$3,215,153	\$3,551,523	\$3,301,000	\$4,342,091	\$4,099,858	\$4,370,196
Fare Revenue - ORCA ¹⁶			[\$123,869]	[\$217,251]	[\$180,736]	[\$624,755]	[\$208,988]
Federal Grants			[\$250,120]	[\$630,043]			
Contribution from Metro ¹⁷			[\$1,596,500]	[\$1,644,395]	[\$1,693,727]	[\$1,744,539]	[\$1,744,539]
Metro Net	\$4,645,140	\$3,215,153	\$1,581,034	\$809,312	\$2,467,628	\$1,730,564	\$2,416,669
Total Expenditures	\$5,022,377	\$3,528,348	\$2,068,872	\$1,340,142	\$3,115,439	\$2,260,526	\$3,051,669

¹² Fare Revenue - Ticket Vending Machine (TVM) includes ORCA and TVM fare revenue received directly by SDOT. Since 2021, KCM has credited ORCA fare revenue against their operating invoices. These amounts are reflected in the blue section under expenses.

¹³ As of 2021, KCM's South Lake Union Operating contribution is shown as invoice credits, and not directly received by SDOT.

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 KCM 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 KCM operating costs displayed here show true operating costs (not what is deducted from the invoices). Starting in 2021, net operating costs are shown below with revenue deductions netted against the invoices.

¹⁷ CARES, CRRSAA, and ARPA credits are deducted from KCM Operating Invoices and are not directly received by SDOT.

TABLE 4: SOUTH LAKE UNION PROJECTED FUNDING AND EXPENSES

	Projections				
Revenues	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
SDOT					
Fare Revenue - TVM ¹⁸	\$46,265	\$59,838	\$73,194	\$86,326	\$46,265
Sponsorship	\$44,111	\$45,406	\$46,713	\$47,985	\$44,111
Federal Grants	\$146,215	\$146,215			\$146,215
Operating Transfer In	\$3,246,362	\$3,246,362	\$3,743,307	\$3,981,497	\$3,246,362
Total Revenue	\$3,482,953	\$3,497,821	\$3,863,214	\$4,115,808	\$3,482,953
Expenditures					
SDOT	\$628,929	\$650,699	\$767,073	\$825,116	\$628,929
Metro Gross ¹⁹	\$5,732,498	\$5,837,427	\$5,052,513	\$5,254,757	\$5,732,498
Fare Revenue - ORCA ²⁰	(\$241,656)	(\$248,906)	(\$256,373)	(\$264,064)	(\$241,656)
Contribution from Metro ²¹	(\$1,700,000)	(\$1,700,000)	(\$1,700,000)	(\$1,700,000)	(\$1,700,000)
Metro Net	\$3,790,842	\$3,888,521	\$3,096,140	\$3,290,693	\$3,790,842
Total Expenditures	\$4,419,771	\$4,539,220	\$3,863,213	\$4,115,809	\$4,419,771

¹⁸ See note 12.¹⁹ See note 15.²⁰ See note 16.²¹ See note 17.

TABLE 5: FIRST HILL STREETCAR HISTORIC AND CURRENT FUNDING AND EXPENSES

	Historical					Adopted Budget	Projected
Revenues	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2024
SDOT							
Fare Revenue ²²	\$979,411						
Sponsorship			(\$17,089)			\$22,000	\$64,427
Federal Grants		\$650,409	\$688,201		\$471,182	\$322,999	\$ 1,997,268
Contribution from Sound Transit ²³	\$5,351,958	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,102,000		
Miscellaneous Revenue	(\$2,333)	\$27,780	\$3,590	\$59,539	\$110,622		\$85,000
Operating Transfer In	\$6,952,063	\$3,881,378	\$3,612,776	\$3,528,892	\$3,647,287	\$6,934,661	\$ 6,953,638
Total Revenue	\$13,281,100	\$9,559,567	\$9,287,478	\$8,588,431	\$9,331,091	\$7,279,660	\$ 9,015,333
Expenditures							
SDOT	\$997,222	\$1,119,874	\$740,602	\$915,474	\$817,462	\$656,606	\$875,000
Metro Gross ²⁴	\$12,150,023	\$6,879,229	\$8,810,587	\$7,851,789	\$8,861,982	\$9,103,231	\$8,506,067
Fare Revenue - ORCA ²⁵		(\$264,633)	(\$262,640)	(\$369,233)	(\$437,127)	(\$1,038,540)	(\$505,377)
Federal Grant Credits			(\$1,029,870)	(\$1,331,031)			
Metro Net	\$12,150,023	\$7,423,058	\$7,518,077	\$6,151,525	\$8,424,855	\$8,064,691	\$8,000,690
Total Expenditures	\$13,147,245	\$7,734,470	\$8,258,679	\$7,066,999	\$9,242,317	\$8,721,297	\$8,875,690

²² Prior to the 2019 Interlocal Agreement, which essentially went into effect in 2020, ORCA revenue was directly received by SDOT. TVM and sponsorship revenue is shown in the SLU tables only, as that is the cost center that the revenue is allocated to. Sponsorship revenues will be split out in future years.

²³ The Sound Transit contribution to FHS of \$5 million annually concluded in 2023.

²⁴ See note 15.

²⁵ See note 16.

TABLE 6: FIRST HILL PROJECTED FUNDING AND EXPENSES

	Projections				
Revenues	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
SDOT					
Fare Revenue - TVM ²⁶	\$65,166	\$68,109	\$70,069	\$71,978	\$65,166
Federal Grants	\$322,999	\$322,499	\$421,477	\$432,959	\$322,999
Miscellaneous Revenue	\$105,000	\$105,000	\$827	[\$2,819]	\$105,000
Operating Transfer In	\$6,953,638	\$6,954,000	\$8,984,155	\$9,180,033	\$6,953,638
Total Revenue	\$7,446,803	\$7,449,608	\$9,476,528	\$9,682,151	\$7,446,803
Expenditures					
SDOT	\$940,894	\$973,603	\$989,014	\$1,026,805	\$940,894
Metro Gross ²⁷	\$9,079,083	\$9,393,929	\$9,211,651	\$9,401,729	\$9,079,083
Fare Revenue - ORCA ²⁸	[\$584,376]	[\$601,907]	[\$619,964]	[\$638,563]	[\$584,376]
Metro Net	\$8,494,707	\$8,792,022	\$8,591,687	\$8,763,166	\$8,494,707
Total Expenditures	\$9,435,601	\$9,765,625	\$9,580,701	\$9,789,971	\$9,435,601

²⁶ See note 12.

²⁷ See note 15.

²⁸ See note 16.

TABLE 7: FIRST HILL STREETCAR PERFORMANCE HISTORIC AND ESTIMATED

	Actuals				Projected					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Ridership	1,360,035	660,029	698,975	937,394	1,175,767	1,316,859	1,356,365	1,397,056	1,438,967	1,482,136
Farebox Recovery Ratio	12%	3%	3%	4%	5%	6%	7%	7%	7%	7%
Productivity	49	31	29	38	48	53	61	63	64	66
"Fare Evasion"	20%	23%	69%	68%	69%	69%	69%	69%	69%	69%
Reliability (On-Time Performance)	87%	63%	83%	87%	83%	83%	83%	83%	83%	83%

TABLE 8: SOUTH LAKE UNION PERFORMANCE HISTORICAL AND ESTIMATED

	Actuals				Projected					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Ridership	503,374	89,414	107,145	180,211	236,121	245,440	283,807	292,321	301,090	310,123
Farebox Recovery Ratio	20%	5%	4%	7%	9%	9%	9%	9%	8%	8%
Productivity	43	11	9	14	19	20	23	23	24	25
"Fare Evasion"	7%	3%	11%	16%	40%	40%	40%	40%	40%	40%
Reliability (On-Time Performance)	32%	46%	48%	65%	61%	61%	61%	61%	61%	61%

5.3 SPONSORSHIP

In March 2023, SDOT contracted with a new vendor, Intersection, to manage the sponsorship program. This agency has significant experience in selling transit sponsorships (working with all other major Puget Sound agencies, including King County Metro and Sound Transit) and arranged sponsors for streetcar vehicles throughout 2023.

As the contract began in March, SDOT received payment for 2023 sales in March 2024 at the end of the annual term. 2023 earned revenue from March 2023 to March 2024 was \$107,378. This revenue will be reflected in the 2024 Operations Report financial tables. With this model, SDOT expects this to create a more predictable yearly revenue source for the streetcar program.

5.4 OPERATING CONTRIBUTIONS

Metro and Sound Transit contributions to the SLU and FHS lines, respectively, continued to be the largest sources of streetcar funding in 2023. The Sound Transit contribution to FHS of \$5 million annually concluded in 2023, while the Metro contribution to SLU of \$1.55 million annually, with slight increases each year, will continue under the Interlocal Agreement (ILA) through 2024. In 2024, SDOT anticipates renegotiating the operating ILA with Metro to include a financial commitment at an equivalent contribution level to 2024. If a new ILA is not approved, Metro's contribution drops to \$872,000 and provides a commitment of a Metro contribution through 2027.

5.5 FEDERAL RELIEF GRANT FUNDING

From 2020 to 2021, federal relief funds for the COVID-19 pandemic provided significant financial support for streetcar operations. The final relief funds from ARPA will be expended in 2024 for 2022 expenses.

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 to Metro invoices such as ORCA fare revenue, federal grant credits, or Metro operating contributions, though SDOT's financial system does not reflect these financial line items as these are credited from Metro Operating Invoices and are not directly received through SDOT's accounting system.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 2023 IN REVIEW

In 2023, the Seattle Streetcar system saw significant signs of recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The streetcar experienced meaningful ridership and fare revenue growth in 2023, compared to 2022, as more employees returned to in-person work and discomfort riding transit due to the COVID-19 pandemic continued to decrease.

Streetcar expenses in 2023 increased by 16% due to the addition of an electro-mechanic position, parts needed for vehicle midlife overhauls, and costs of additional streetcar security personnel. This includes the full operations and maintenance expenses to run the streetcar, not the actuals paid by SDOT (with fare revenue, operations contributions, and federal grant credits deducted).

The streetcar safety program continued to mature, launching new processes to improve the rollout of safety improvements, as well as implementing a new committee to meet federal regulatory requirements. Security improvements implemented in 2022 are proving effective as rates of the most types of security incidents dropped significantly compared to 2022.

6.2 LOOKING AHEAD

SDOT anticipates streetcar operations, ridership, and revenue to continue to track with Metro performance as transit systems continue to recover in 2024. As shown in 2023 data, the Seattle Streetcar continues to be a key inter-neighborhood connector and is experiencing steadily increasing ridership from low levels in 2020 due to the pandemic.

Program wide, SDOT will be actively addressing a range of streetcar issues in 2024, including:

- Wrapping up consultant-led review of streetcar program best practices. In 2024, we will incorporate these best practices into streetcar program management, fare policies, financial planning, and performance metrics.
- Supporting Metro as they seek to address streetcar workforce challenges for hard-to-fill maintenance positions.
- Preparing a request for proposals to conduct an overhaul of FHS batteries to preserve streetcar service levels.
- Preparing marketing materials for businesses along the South Lake Union line to promote the route and ORCA Business Program participation to increase fare revenue.
- Expanding accessibility and affordability on transit through continuing to support low-income fare programs in partnership with Metro.
- Working with Metro to renew the Interlocal Agreement for Streetcar Operations and Maintenance.
- Participating in the FTA Triennial Review process.
- Planning for upcoming major expenses, such as upcoming major vehicle maintenance.
- Continuing to implement federal safety regulation changes resulting from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL).
- Continuing to reduce security incidents onboard streetcars and on platforms by providing consistent streetcar security coverage.
- Working with Sound Transit on mitigation efforts for the West Seattle-Ballard Link Extension, the construction of which likely means potential significant impacts to the operations of both SLU and FHS lines.

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