

Metro Service Guidelines Task Force

Meeting Summary

September 17, 2015, 3:00 – 6:00 PM

Mercer Island Community Center, Mercer Room 1-2

Task Force members present: Nancy Backus, Amy Biggs, Vic Bishop, Josh Brown, Tim Burgess, Fred Butler, John Chelminiak, Suzette Cooke, Dorene Cornwell, Lauren Craig, Chris Eggen, Patrick Green, Josh Kavanagh, Matt Larson, John Marchione, Gordon McHenry, Lynn Moody, Shefali Ranganathan, Tom Rasmussen, Carla Saulter, Jim Stanton; *Ex-Officio members:* Kevin Desmond, Mike Harbour; *Facilitator:* John Howell (Cedar River Group)

Members not present: Mahnaz Eshetu, Jim Ferrell, Hilary Franz, George Frasier, Matt Koltnow, Scott Kubly, Jon Scholes, Edna Shim

Presenters: Jana Demas (Project Manager, Service Guidelines Task Force, King County Metro); Victor Obeso (Deputy General Manager, Planning and Customer Services, King County Metro); Chris O’Claire (Manager, Strategy & Performance, King County Metro)

Welcome, Meeting Objectives and Summary of Technical Workshops

John Howell welcomed task force members and reviewed the agenda, the purposes for the meeting and the committee’s charge. He summarized the task force’s response to the topics reviewed at the August technical workshops, as follows:

- Members liked the changes related to geographic value that involved valuing center-to-center connections and park-and-ride lots in scoring, and creating minimum service levels.
- Members liked the change in the definition of low income (from 100 percent to 200 percent of the federal poverty level) for scoring, but were concerned that the proposed scoring methodology might have the unintended consequence of reducing the score for some low-income and minority communities. There was also concern that the proposed changes in scoring for social equity tend to reduce the impact as compared to geographic value.
- Members liked the ideas presented for alternative services.
- There was no consensus regarding the service type options.

Task force members did not offer any additions to this summary of their response to the workshops.

Moving Toward Recommendations

Mr. Howell reviewed proposed changes to the document titled “Service Guidelines Draft Principles and Recommendations,” dated 9/14/15. The document is intended to capture the task force’s emerging areas of agreement and to serve as its recommendations. The changes reflect task force members’ comments at the last meeting and ideas from the task force during the workshops.

Draft Principles

There was just one change to the Draft Principles—to remove a sentence from the detail of a principle on page 2 regarding the demand for service outweighing available resources. It was deleted because it appears in the prior bulleted statement (on maintaining and improving services for geographic value).

In discussion, task force members offered the following comments about the change and the Draft Principles:

- The statement that each part of the county should feel value for the transit services is an important one. The sentence fits better in the section on geographic value than the section on demand and resources.
- The sentence is fine as a principle, but is broad. It is not clear how we will know if residents “feel value for the transit services” they receive.
- The draft recommendations would not change how constituents have felt about and voted on transit measures in the past.
- Add a principle on distribution of service reductions so as not to have any one geographic region take the large majority of reductions.

Draft Recommendations

A general comment was that the draft recommendations should be run by a labor representative, especially the section on alternative services. (It was noted that the two labor representatives on the task force had resigned recently.)

Guidelines. The revised draft included several additions to bullets under the recommendation “Make changes to the Service Guidelines.” Comments from task force members were:

- The term “center” needs to be clarified in a footnote or glossary.
- Clarify that there is a minimum level of service for all communities.
- Refer to all park-and-rides.

Planning process. The revised draft included several additions to the “Make changes to the planning process” recommendation. Comments from task force members included the following:

- The new last bullet (“Better communicate the schedule or timeline for when Metro will be making changes . . .”) should say: communicate well in advance about any changes.
- The language of the new last bullet should be tightened up.
- The term “accessibility” used in the second bullet and elsewhere in the recommendations needs to be clarified so that it is distinguished from the use of “accessibility” to refer to services provided under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Alternative services. The revised draft included one addition and a wording change in the recommendation “Enhance the alternative services program.” Comments from task force members included the following:

- Clarify that when considering cuts in the bottom 25 percent of service, Metro should look at possible ways to restructure service and/or utilize alternative service options. Note the difference between reallocation—where service hours are reduced in one area and moved to

another area—and restructuring, where service is reorganized to make different connections, often due to infrastructure, such as Link Light Rail, or large service changes, such as RapidRide.

- Mention that alternative services should be lower cost than fixed-route alternatives.
- Expanding the alternative service program should not take away from other parts of the system. The idea is to replace expensive service with less-expensive service that is responsive to community needs. Any additional funding needed to expand the alternative service program should come from new resources.
- Alternative services need to respond to changes in the population and where they live and work. Monitoring of population trends will be needed.
- Some areas of the county would benefit from the flexibility to deploy alternative services in lieu of fixed-route bus service.
- Define “restructure” and revise the bullet to say: “When making reductions, Metro examines redesign, reallocation and alternative services as ways to mitigate the loss of service to communities where possible.”

Partnerships. The revised draft included one addition to the recommendation “Make changes to partnership and land-use initiatives.” The task force did not have comments or questions.

New funding and efficiencies. The revised draft included one addition to the recommendation “Support new funding and continued operational efficiencies.” Comments from task force members included the following:

- Add a reference to developing a policy about new corridors, not just services.
- Make the last sentence into a separate bullet (“Integrate the values of the Service Guidelines into the Long-Range Planning process and resulting plan”). Clarify the language about integration of the task force recommendations with the Long-Range Plan. The Long-Range Plan is looking at the future, and the best way to serve growth with a transportation system that includes Sound Transit 3 projects and other enhancements.
- Be clearer about outcomes.

A task force member raised a question regarding the staff capacity needed to carry out the task force recommendations. Victor Obeso said that the recommendations provide more clarity in carrying out the Service Guidelines, and that implementation has been and will continue to be a learning process and impetus to find ways to be more efficient.

Further Analysis Work

Service Investment Outcomes with Task Force Recommended Changes

Jana Demas reviewed draft changes in the target service level analysis to follow up on the draft task force recommendations on social equity and geographic value (see handout titled “Recommendations to enhance investments – Social equity and geographic value,” and a four-page handout titled “Follow-up Analysis and Questions from Technical Workshops”). On social equity, she noted that since gradation of the score had the effect of giving some areas a lower score than they currently have, the staff suggests a different scoring methodology to better address the Task Force recommendation that would keep the

scores the same (5 points) for low-income and minority areas with boardings at or above the average, and provide 3 points for those areas just below the average. To include more disadvantaged populations, they suggest changing the definition of low-income from 100 percent of the federal poverty level to 200 percent. This change also makes the definition consistent with the ORCA LIFT program.

On geographic value, Ms. Demas said that the Task Force suggests gradation to the corridor scoring, ensuring minimum service levels on every corridor, and including all Park & Rides in the scoring, including leased lots and all sizes of lots. She noted that the centers are listed and shown in a map in the Service Guidelines. In response to a question about how transit activity centers are defined, Victor Obeso said that the criteria for identifying transit activity centers included the number of intersecting routes, and the level of residential and commercial activity.

➡ There was a request to send task force members the criteria for defining transit activity centers, and the list and map of centers.

In response to a question about capturing origin and destination data from ORCA cards, Chris O’Claire said that Metro is starting to look at these data. In response to a question on Park & Rides, Ms. Demas said they range in size from 20 to 1,500 stalls. For assigning points, Metro uses the average vehicle occupancy rate of 1.1 persons per stall. In summary, Ms. Demas said that these latest changes in the service level corridor analysis produced an additional 123,000 hours of investment need.

She also pointed out changes in the draft Alternative Services Program based on the task force’s recommendations (see slide, “Recommendations to enhance investments – Alternative services”).

Service Type Options

Ms. O’Claire introduced a new service type option, called “Service Type Option 5: Peak Policy Emphasis.” The staff developed this option after the technical workshops to respond to task force members’ comments on Options 1 – 4. Option 5 has the effect of identifying fewer peak-only routes for cuts in a reduction scenario, spreads reductions more evenly across the county, and includes the lowest percentage of hours cut in low-income and minority areas in a reduction scenario than any of the other options. Ms. O’Claire noted that there is little difference in productivity in the reduction scenario in all five of the options.

In response to questions, Ms. O’Claire offered the following additional information:

- If both a peak route with poor productivity and a local route are in the bottom 25 percent to consider for cuts, Metro will look at how to protect service in the corridor.
- For any service change, Metro reviews the potential impact on low-income and minority areas. This equity analysis is required by federal law.
- When facing a need to reduce service, Metro looks at a variety of possibilities, such as reducing the number of trips and eliminating the tail of the route in a neighborhood. The staff will also talk with the affected community to learn what is important to them.
- The 100,000 hours to be cut in the reduction scenario represents 3 percent of Metro service. It is hard to say if the cuts for 100,000 hours would scale exactly for a larger cut. Metro would look at ways to restructure and would try to learn what the community needs.

- Service types have the most impact in reduction scenarios.

Task force members offered the following comments:

- Many low-income people and minorities do not travel during peak hours.
- It is not clear why the impact on low-income and minority corridors is so much lower with Option 5 than for the other options, especially Option 2, which is the most similar to it.

☞ There was a request from several members to better understand the calculations for Option 5 that show impact to low-income and minority areas of the 100,000 hour reduction.

Moving Toward Recommendations

Because there had not been a clear consensus on service types from the workshop discussions, Mr. Howell reached out to some task force members to get their thoughts before this meeting. He asked task force members for their thinking now about service types. The following summarizes the comments from task force members:

- *Smaller cities.* Several task force members from the Sound Cities Association said that there was agreement that both peak service and all-day service for the transit-dependent were important. The option of most interest was Option 5, followed by Option 2.
- *Traffic.* The peak emphasis in Options 2 and 5 would help relieve traffic congestion.
- *Most important functions.* Providing peak period service and serving transit-dependent people the two of the most important functions of Metro. Emphasizing all-day service would serve the largest number of needs.
- *Growth forecast.* The transit system needs to accommodate the region's expected growth. The Long-Range Plan will address this issue, but the choices made now need to be flexible. The projected growth suggests the need to use alternative services to serve growing areas and seed new service.
- *Changes in minority and low-income populations.* Along with regional growth, there will be changes in the locations and needs of low-income and minority populations. Metro will need to address these changes in service planning.
- *Accessibility.* The description in the recommendations uses the term "accessibility." The recommendations need to be clear if this term refers to ADA paratransit services, and use a different term for more general access issues.
- *Geographic impact.* There were concerns about the effects of service reduction in different parts of the county. Option 1 has disproportionate reductions in the south. Option 5 spreads the reduction the most evenly throughout the county. There were questions about whether these percentages would be maintained in a reduction of more than the 100,000 hours. The system is paid for by all residents, but some do not seem to feel they are equitably served now, and a reduction of equal size across the county could make this worse. Future reductions should not disproportionately affect areas of the county. Metro should consider restructuring and alternative service when a reduction needs to be made. The challenge would be whether or not there is funding for the alternative services.

- *Region-wide support.* The question of why there was not region-wide support for the last transit ballot measure is a separate issue for future follow-up for jurisdictions and others to discuss with the Executive and Council.
- *Additions to principles.* Maintaining geographic equity in a reduction and looking at ways to restructure need to be addressed in the task force’s principles statements.
- *Social Equity.* There needs to be a way to measure the service to transit-dependent residents, to help ensure that their needs are being met.
- *Importance of alternative services.* The task force’s recommendations need to be strengthened to say that there are two roles for alternative services. One is to preserve mobility for less productive areas when service is being reduced. The second is to grow the system and seed new service. Alternative services are a good way to grow services less expensively. Decision makers should let Metro innovate in developing alternative services.
- *Need for more resources to grow transit services.* More resources are needed to serve the varied transit needs across the county. No matter which service type option is chosen, there needs to be continuing work to secure the resources to expand Metro’s capacity to serve growing and changing needs. Adding resources will require getting voter support.
- *Support for Option 5.* A large majority of task force members said they supported or could accept Option 5. A few were still uncertain or did not find strong differences among Options 2-5. The reasons member gave for supporting Option 5 were that it:
 - Had features that seemed important to representatives of urban, suburban and rural areas.
 - Provided for both peak hour needs and social equity better than the other options.
 - Appeared to spread the reductions more evenly across the county than the other options in the sample reduction scenario.
 - Does the best job of protecting service for low-income and minority residents in a reduction scenario.

Mr. Howell summarized the discussion as an emerging consensus for Option 5 with several issues needing follow-up. These were:

- Language on insuring that future reductions do not impact any area of the county significantly more than another.
- Information to understand the calculation for an Option 5 reductions’ impact on low-income and minority areas.
- A couple of suggested changes in the principles.
- A number of suggested changes in the recommendations, besides the choice of service type.

Mr. Howell will talk with task force members and staff to develop final draft language. Depending on the changes, the task force might need to discuss some refinements at its last meeting.

Draft Final Report

The task force members received an initial draft of the final report with the meeting materials. The draft describes the task force's charge, process and key areas discussed. The principles and recommendations will be dropped in when finalized.

Mr. Howell asked for any comments or suggested changes in the draft report by Friday, September 25. He will revise the principles and recommendations and send task force members a new version for comment, likely the following week.

The final task force meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 7, from 3:00 to 6:00 PM at the Chinook Building in downtown Seattle.