

Service Guidelines Task Force

8. Alternative Services

a. Overview.....	8.1
b. Existing Services	8.3

Introduction

“Alternative services” is Metro’s term for transportation options tailored to the needs of communities that lack the land use, infrastructure, and density to support traditional fixed-route service. Examples include flexible rideshare options for commuters or a community shuttle service provided through a Metro community partnership. Alternative services are intended to address unmet needs in the transit system and to be cost-effective.

This section provides information about Metro’s current policies and initiatives relating to the development and deployment of alternative services. Potential new services are also presented.

Links to Information

1. Five Year Implementation Plan for Alternatives to Traditional Transit Service Delivery: http://bit.ly/sgtf8_1
2. Alternative Services Website: http://bit.ly/sgtf8_2
3. Service Guidelines Task Force Website: <http://www.kingcounty.gov/sgtaskforce>

Overview

Overview

Metro's alternative services program brings service to parts of King County that don't have the infrastructure, density, or land use to support traditional fixed-route bus service. In such areas, alternative transportation services may be a better match for community transportation needs. They may also be more cost-effective. The King County Council approved \$12 million for these services in the 2015-2016 biennium, and Metro is working to provide more of these innovative transportation options in the near future.

Metro offers alternative services in areas where they can help make the public transportation system more efficient, more productive, and more effective at getting people where they want to go — including areas where regular bus service has been discontinued or is not available.

Goals for investing in alternative services

Metro will seek alternative services that...

- More effectively serve markets that are not well served by fixed-route transit.
- Match services to an area's land use and infrastructure characteristics.

Metro will seek opportunities to...

- Collaborate with stakeholders to design a service that meets their needs.
- Partner with communities to deliver and market these services.
- Develop services that can be sustained over time.

Rollout

When the King County Council adopted the 2015-2016 budget, it provided a set of priorities for how Metro will provide alternative services over the next two years. Below is a list of areas where alternative services are being developed or considered, organized by planning priority.

Priority 1: Reduce the impact of service reductions.

Provide alternative services that address transit needs in places where fixed-route bus service has been reduced or eliminated. The following jurisdictions are partnering with Metro now to plan and launch alternative services in 2015. Metro plans to identify additional areas for alternative services in 2015.

- Burien
- Mercer Island
- Snoqualmie/North Bend

Priority 2: Right-size transit services.

Plan and begin offering alternative services in certain communities where fixed-route bus service resources could be reinvested to better serve mobility needs. Metro will partner with local stakeholders to engage the following communities, which are named in the 2013 alternative services plan, in collaborative planning and design processes in 2015. The services designed would debut in 2016, after adoption by the King County Council.

- Vashon Island
- Southeast King County

Priority 3: Complement fixed-route or DART service when Metro revenues are growing.

Use alternative transit services to complement existing bus service if additional revenues become available. Metro has not yet identified areas where alternative services would be developed under this priority. Metro expects to develop an application process, solicit applications, and plan and begin selected projects late 2016 and 2017.

Approach

Metro uses the service guidelines to identify potential routes that would be good candidates for replacement with alternative services. Some of these areas have been identified in the five-year plan for alternative service delivery. Other candidate areas are identified through a combination of interest expressed by local jurisdictions, a willingness by those jurisdictions to partner with Metro on alternative service delivery, and a market analysis. Metro then meets with community stakeholders, such as bus riders, local jurisdictions, schools, churches, and employers, to identify existing transportation providers, service gaps, and mobility needs.

Metro or partnering jurisdictions ask current and potential users of the service how and why they use the service, what other transportation options might be available to the community, and what connections to the public transit network they need to maintain.

Metro then proposes two or three alternative service options for each candidate route, based on the following criteria:

- The ability to expand travel options for residents in the community
- How well the option maintains the public's access to "important trips" —for example, to critical medical services
- How well the option addresses Metro's service guidelines related to social equity and geographic value
- Cost-effectiveness

Metro invites the community to propose other alternative service options or modify the ones Metro is proposing. This is an opportunity to bring in other community partners to help provide service. Metro will then choose one or more alternative products for implementation and recommend them for approval. Once an alternative service has been started in an area, Metro will evaluate it annually for future funding.

History

Metro's five-year plan for alternative service delivery, accepted by the King County Council on Sept. 17, 2013, lays out a framework for providing alternatives to fixed-route bus service in less-populated areas. The plan is based on Metro's strategic planning policies and shaped by public feedback. After the County Council accepted the plan, Metro worked collaboratively with community stakeholders and the public on our first demonstration project in the Snoqualmie Valley.

Public involvement

Metro met with stakeholders in early 2012 to develop and refine the five-year plan that was submitted to, and approved by, the King County Council. Metro also invited bus riders to complete an online questionnaire about alternative services. The feedback received will provide valuable insight as Metro discusses options with communities where considering alternative services.

Metro is now working with communities in current alternative service project areas to identify existing transportation providers, service gaps, and local travel needs. They, along with other stakeholders, will help Metro develop options for delivering those services.

Existing Services

Metro has identified a range of potential new alternative services, some of which have not yet been tested. These services may be modified, or new options developed, during the planning and design processes.

Community Shuttle

A route with flexible service areas that is provided through a community partnership.

Key characteristics:

- Metro provides vehicle (6-15 passengers)
- Fixed and flexible service area
- Paid driver
- Community partner provides resources and marketing

Community Hub

A local transportation center, giving people access to transportation resources (e.g., community vans, bikes, and information).

Key characteristics:

- Community partner provides location, transportation info, and scheduling
- Metro provides vehicles for community use
- Flexibility allows regularly scheduled and one-time trips

Flexible Rideshare

Variable ridesharing via promotion of mobile and web-based applications.

Key characteristics:

- Metro-provided or private vehicles
- Responds to unique commuter needs
- May include set pickup points and driver incentives

