



# Service Reduction Outreach

Public Engagement Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Prepared by King County Department of Transportation Communications

April 2014

## Executive Summary

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### Overview

Metro service is funded primarily by sales tax, and the economic downturn that started in 2008 caused a significant reduction in Metro's revenue from this source. We have taken actions to make up for the lost revenue and preserve most bus service.

While many of these actions are resulting in continuing or new savings, some were only temporary or one-time measures that run out in mid-2014. Metro still faces an ongoing budget gap.

When we were conducting our public outreach, we estimated it would be necessary to cut up to 17 percent of Metro service. The actual size of the reduction would be revised based on updated financial information at the time when the County Council considers the cuts. The county's March sales tax forecast shows that the economy is getting stronger, and Metro is now expected to collect more sales tax revenue than predicted earlier. While this won't be enough to maintain current service levels, we are able to revise our estimated 600,000-hour service cut proposal to approximately 550,000 service hours.

The proposed service reductions are consistent with the policy direction and priorities adopted in Metro's Strategic Plan and Service Guidelines. Service cuts would begin in September 2014, with more to follow in 2015.

This report documents the activities we undertook to inform and hear from the public about these proposed reductions—including who we heard from and what we heard. Outreach began on Nov. 7, 2013, and we accepted public comment through Feb, 7, 2014.

We informed the public of a worst-case scenario, using the best information available: a possible service reduction of up to 600,000 hours, plus an additional 45,000 hours to be cut if Alaskan Way Viaduct mitigation funding was not extended by the state. The cuts would have begun with an initial 45,000-hour reduction in June 2014, with more to follow in September 2014 and February, June, and September 2015. After this outreach began, the state extended funding for viaduct mitigation service through 2015. The current package of recommended service cuts reflects the revised financial forecast that will apply as the County Council is considering the cuts.

### Outreach process

We held a press conference on Nov. 7, 2013 at which we invited the media to learn about the reduction proposal and our outreach. That same day, we launched a robust website with details of the proposal, [video content in English and Spanish](#), an online survey, and a calendar of outreach events where the public could speak with staff members directly about the proposed reductions.

We invited the public to participate in our outreach through many channels: subscriber transit alerts, the General Manager's e-newsletter, ORCA passport clients (employers), commute trip reduction networks (large employers), community partners (a database of more than 500 organizations that serve people who use transit), tweets from @KCMetroBus, and Metro's Facebook and Instagram accounts. We mailed posters and brochures to senior centers, libraries, churches, schools, and community centers throughout the county. We also purchased advertising in four ethnic media publications serving Spanish, Chinese, and Vietnamese speakers.

Between Nov. 7, 2013 and Feb. 7, 2014 we hosted nine public meetings in different parts of the county, more than 30 outreach events at places where we could speak directly with those who use our service, and more than 25 stakeholder briefings—six of which were well-publicized open house/presentations at the county's six unincorporated area community councils. We documented feedback received at these events, encouraged people to complete our survey, and collected comments and questions via a dedicated phone line, email, and written correspondence.

We provided translated information and phone lines in 11 languages other than English: Amharic, Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Oromo, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tigrinya, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese. We fully translated the brochure, video, and survey into Spanish, and provided an overview summary in the other languages. These translated materials were available on the website and distributed as needed at outreach-van events. In total, we provided eight feedback sessions to organizations serving seniors, people with low incomes, and/or people with limited English proficiency. We provided interpretation services in Amharic, Cambodian, Chinese, Oromo, Russian, Spanish, Somali, Tigrinya, and Vietnamese at these events.

We used social media throughout the three-month outreach period to keep people informed. We used the hashtag #KCMetroCuts to promote outreach activities and meetings via Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. This effort included an innovative series of [Instagram videos](#).

We wrote blog posts summarizing what we heard at each of our public meetings, and shared them via the Facebook Have a Say page. We also fed the posts into a section of the website entitled "What we've heard." The comment feature on the blog allowed people to add additional feedback we may not have documented from the meetings, or to clarify what we had heard.

## **Participation**

We received 4,588 survey responses and 879 emails, phone calls, letters, and blog comments. We talked directly with 357 people at public meetings and 10,432 people at outreach events.

During the three months of outreach:

- The project website had more than 253,000 page views.

- Our eight Metro Matters blog posts about the service reductions got nearly 1,400 views and 47 comments, which are taken into consideration in the public feedback section of this report.
- Metro made 19 Facebook posts, reaching an estimated 7,500 people and generating nearly 900 clicks on web links to additional information about the service reductions or meetings and 250 likes/shares.
- We made 91 tweets from @KCMetroBus that generated 55 favorites, 290 retweets, and 71 replies. The estimated reach of the hashtag #KCMetroCuts was 128,044, based on three weeks of hashtag snapshots.

Some demographic details of survey respondents:

- A majority live in the city of Seattle.
- A majority ride the bus three or more days a week.
- The largest age group among respondents was 24-35 years.
- Twenty-five percent of survey respondents who answered a question about their incomes reported annual household incomes of \$35,000 or less; followed by \$55,001-\$75,000 (17 percent); \$31,001-\$55,000 (16 percent); \$100,001-\$140,000 (16 percent); \$75,001-\$100,000 (15 percent); and more than \$140,000 (11 percent).
- A majority of survey respondents identified themselves as white (76 percent); followed by Asian-American/Pacific Islander (10 percent); multiple ethnicities (6 percent); Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino (3 percent); Black/African-American (2 percent); and American Indian/Alaska Native (1 percent).
- Three percent said they speak a language other than English at home.

## Equity and social justice

Metro's community engagement must ensure that the diversity of our customer base is reflected in the public feedback we receive and consider during our decision-making processes. In this case, we used census data mapped to activity centers that would lose transit service if the proposed cuts were made to reach our decision to provide materials and conduct outreach activities in 11 languages other than English. These languages, listed below in alphabetical order, are spoken by more than 7 percent of the population around activity centers that would lose more than 15 percent of transit trips.

- Amharic
- Arabic
- Chinese
- Korean
- Oromo
- Russian
- Somali
- Spanish
- Tigrinya
- Ukrainian
- Vietnamese

### Translated information

We distributed hundreds of translated handouts at outreach-van events and made the translated information available on our website. We also promoted use of this information to community partners when we asked for their involvement to help spread the word about the bus service cuts to the people they serve.

### All other languages

We provided a one-page handout with an overview of the proposed reductions and a phone number to call to comment, ask questions, or request additional information. These handouts were available for download on the website.

In response to an optional question, 122 people (3 percent) of our survey respondents said they speak a language other than English at home.

### Language lines

We offered phone lines in the following 11 languages: Amharic, Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Oromo, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tigrinya, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese. People who speak these languages could call, hear a recorded message in their native language, and leave a voice message. We translated these messages and have documented them along with the other public comments we received.

We also used a phone interpreter service to return phone calls and answer people's questions. During the official public engagement period, 22 messages were translated

from the Spanish language line and 1 message was translated from the Amharic language line. Of the Spanish phone calls, 10 involved inquiries about the service reductions. These and the message left in Amharic were returned with the assistance of a translator.

### **Ethnic media**

At the start of outreach in November, we purchased one week of advertising in the following publications: *El Siete Dias*, *NW Asian Weekly*, *Nguot Viet Tay Bac*, and *Seattle Chinese Post* (see copies of each ad in Appendix E).

### **Outreach to underrepresented populations, use of interpreters as appropriate**

We reached out to organizations that serve underrepresented and transit-dependent populations at the start of our outreach – by email to invite them to learn more and spread the word to those they serve, and by contacting organizations to discuss our outreach approach and solicit their input on the best ways to reach those they serve. In some cases, we worked with the organizations to take our outreach van and do feedback sessions with their clients and interpreters as appropriate. In other cases, we mailed or emailed information for the organizations to distribute to their clients. This work has continued past the Feb. 7 end of the official public comment period.

In total, we provided eight feedback sessions to organizations serving seniors, people with low incomes, and/or people with limited English proficiency. We provided interpretation services in Amharic, Cambodian, Chinese, Oromo, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tigrinya, and Vietnamese at these events.

## Key themes – what we heard

Below is a high-level overview of the concerns and ideas we heard from the public. Each of these topic areas is detailed in the summaries of feedback received.

### About the proposed service reductions

- **Overcrowding** – A top concern for participants is that service cuts will create more crowding on the buses they ride. Many experience full and standing rides now. Seniors and people with disabilities are particularly concerned about their physical safety on overcrowded buses if these changes are adopted.
- **Longer trips** – Another top concern for participants is the increase in travel time if these changes are adopted. Whether they have to go farther to access transit or make more transfers, participants on average expect their travel times to increase by 30 minutes in each direction.
- **Increased traffic congestion, environmental impacts** – Many participants said they were concerned about riders returning to their vehicles and clogging already-congested roads. They value reducing our region's impact on climate change and the role of a good public transportation system in reducing trips by single-occupancy vehicles, providing a network of service so people can choose not to own a car in the face of the urban density and population growth expected in the coming decades.
- **Rider alternatives won't work, decrease in use of transit** – Nearly half of survey respondents who use a route proposed for deletion or reduction/revision said that their new options will not work for them. Overwhelmingly, this is related to the inconvenience of the trip taking longer than it does today.
- **Need for more service** – A majority of survey respondents said Metro should be adding service instead of planning to reduce it.
- **Service to UW, First Hill hospitals** – Many employees, students, and patients currently have one-seat rides from places outside the Seattle business core to hospitals at the University of Washington and in the First Hill area, on routes such as 205, 211, 271, 167, and 193X. Riders and employers are concerned about longer commute times and the availability of service in the late evening, at night, and in the early morning for shift workers. People with disabilities and health issues expressed concerns about transferring downtown or having to walk up a steep hill to get to First Hill hospitals.
- **Service to community colleges** – Students and employees of Bellevue College, South Seattle Community College, and Lake Washington Technical College commute from many locations around the county. Many said they already take two or three buses to get to school, so adding a longer walk or an additional transfer will be burdensome to them. They also attend classes in the evenings and on

weekends, times when many service cuts are proposed. Bellevue College students expressed safety concerns due to violent incidents that have happened along the pathways that students would use to get to class if these reductions are made.

- **Topography** – We heard about a few areas in Seattle where a reduction in service would make transit particularly inaccessible due to steep and hilly topography.
- **Loss of service to particular areas** – there are some neighborhoods in the county that face a loss of all-day service or a severe reduction in peak-only service that is their nearest transit service. People who use this service, either every day or occasionally, expressed concerns about it going away and never coming back. They were particularly concerned about neighbors with disabilities or low incomes who may have no other way of getting around besides transit.
- **Support for certain restructure concepts** – Some stakeholder groups saw a silver lining in the reduction proposal. Transit for All, the Transit Advisory Commission, and others expressed support for route restructures that would reduce duplication and serve riders better, with enough resources to meet ridership demand.

### **About alternative ways to make the cuts or minimize impacts**

We received many ideas intended to mitigate the effects of the service cuts if they are made. The most frequent suggestion was to reduce frequency of service to maintain coverage, while keeping the existing service network intact. People were worried that once service goes away from an area, it will be gone forever. They expressed hope that as more revenues become available, frequency can be restored if the existing network is still in place.

### **About funding**

At meetings and outreach events, as well as in our survey, people said they wanted to help solve Metro's funding shortfall. Their feedback falls into the following categories:

- **Identify other revenue sources** – Examples: raise fares or do a better job of collecting them; provide better service, then market that service and incentivize use; generate revenue from big business; institute an income tax.
- **Reduce costs** – Examples: reduce staff salaries and overhead; focus on maintaining existing service instead of investing in things like RapidRide or expensive amenities; continue investing in alternative services.
- **Find a sustainable solution** – People said they want revenue sources for public transportation that are not volatile like sales tax is. They're tired of threats of reductions and short-term or incremental tax increases that do not solve the fundamental problem.



**About our planning process**

Forty-eight percent of survey respondents said they had heard of Metro's service guidelines; 40 percent said they had not. Twelve percent weren't sure. When asked, "Regardless of how you feel about the proposed changes, do you understand how these priorities shaped the proposed changes to your route(s)?" 78 percent said they understood "very well" or "well enough."

**About our outreach**

We received compliments about our outreach, in particular the website that described the reduction proposal in unprecedented detail. However, we were also criticized for a lack of meaningful engagement. Some said that the decision had already been made, so their participation was just to allow Metro to check outreach off our list.

A vast majority (87 percent) said they used the website content to understand the service reduction proposal, followed by information shared via the news media or neighborhood blog (31 percent). The third most-cited resource was our face-to-face outreach activities (8 percent). When asked whether these resources helped participants understand how the changes being proposed would affect them, 86 percent said yes. Sixty three percent of respondents said they were given enough time to provide meaningful feedback in the decision-making process, and 65 percent said they strongly or somewhat agreed that taking the time to share their views will result in better decisions being made about service reductions.