

## Section Two:

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# Planning Context

### Introduction

The Six-Year Plan for Public Transportation 2002-2007 (six-year plan) will continue the successful efforts of the previously adopted plan to create a multi-destinational network of services and facilities. The adopted plan triggered a county-wide reorientation of transit services in the late 1990s; this reorientation was made in an effort to make transit more relevant to changing travel needs at all levels—regionally, locally, and among the numerous cities and neighborhoods of King County.

Results of this effort are promising: Ridership in 2000 was at record levels for King County Metro; service efficiency has improved in all areas of the county; historic declines in transit use per capita have reversed direction; the number of households with residents using transit has increased; and significant progress towards very aggressive commute trip reduction goals is evident in numerous employment sites around the county. Successful, innovative efforts to reduce single occupant vehicle commuting through partnerships with major institutions and employers have received national recognition.

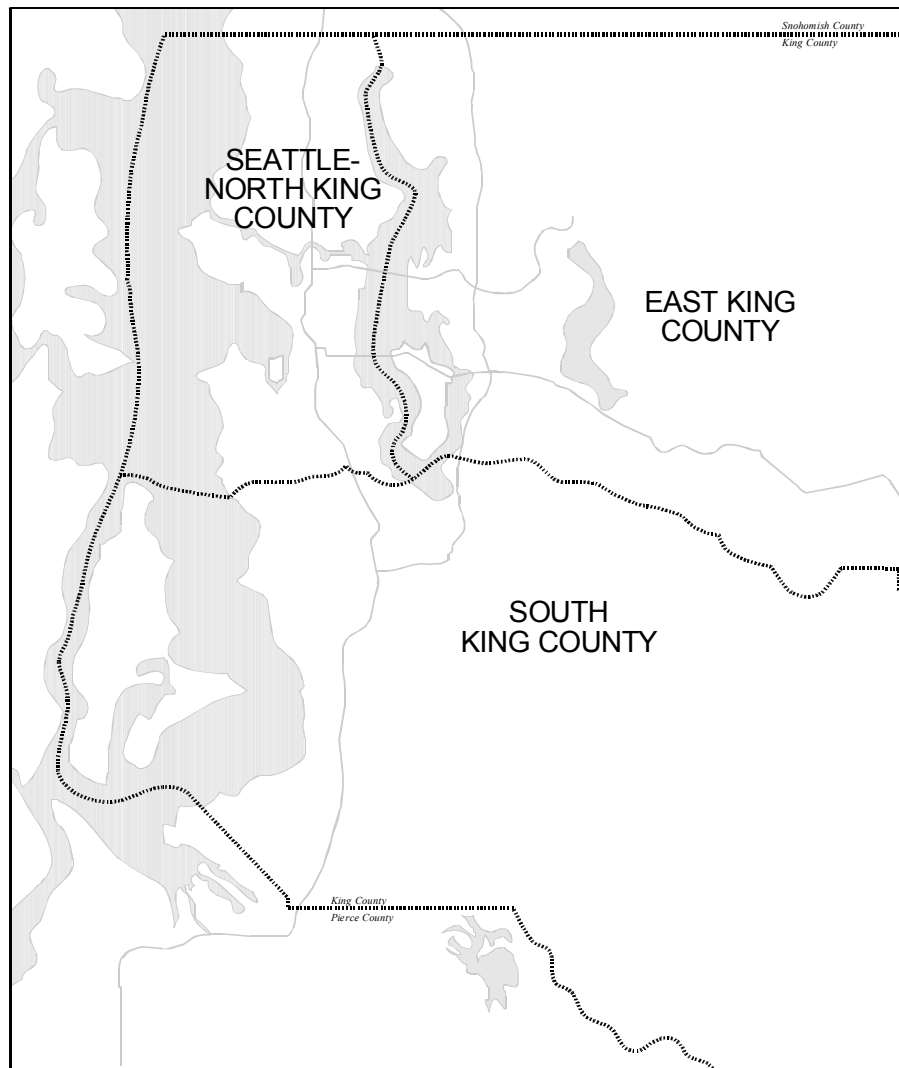
The six-year plan sets forth objectives and strategies for transit, paratransit, rideshare services, transportation demand management and supporting facilities in King County. It establishes the policy basis on which annual operating and capital program decisions can be made. The plan serves as an implementation guide, intended for update as changing conditions or priorities dictate.

### Relationship to Other Plans

The objectives and strategies in the six-year plan are consistent with the King County Long-Range Policy Framework for Public Transportation (LPRF), the King County Comprehensive Plan, the King County Countywide Planning Policies and the Metropolitan Transportation Plan “Destination 2030” adopted by the Puget Sound

Regional Council. The plan proposes that transit services and facilities be focussed in the urban areas of King County. The plan also establishes a strong link between land use and transit actions in order to make development, as well as transit services and facilities, more efficient. The continued development and continued support of King County's Designated Urban Growth Area with higher levels of transit service are central components of the region's growth strategy.

The plan is consistent with state and federal law, and recognizes other planning efforts completed or under way in the region. These include local jurisdiction comprehensive plans, Sound Transit's regional transit system plan, and state and local plans for major transportation facility investments.



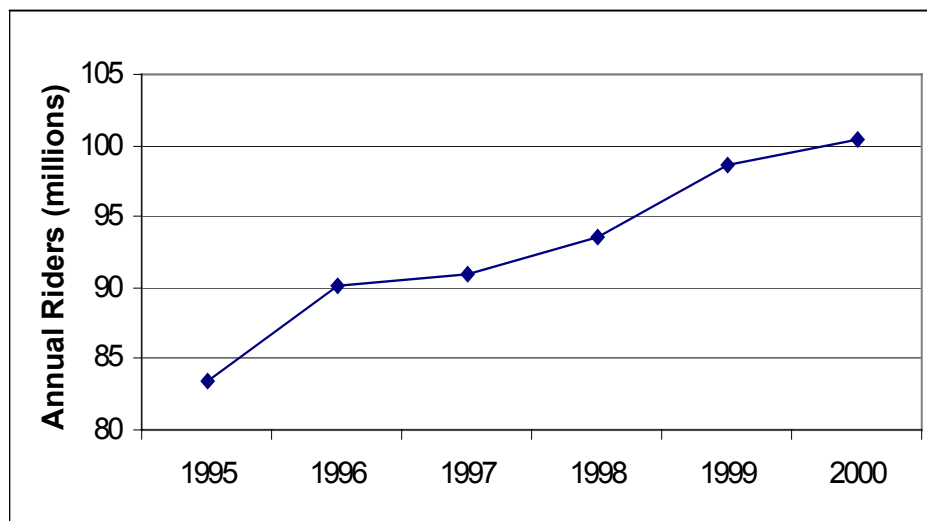
**Figure 2-1. – Approximate King County Public Transportation Planning Subareas**

## Recent System Trends

The transit system is meeting or exceeding the 1996-2001 plan progress targets. Customer satisfaction levels remain high, and the public remains confident in King County's ability to operate a quality transit system.

King County Metro Transit ridership is at an all-time high. There were over 100 million riders in 2000, representing almost a twenty-five percent increase in ridership since 1995.

Service efficiency has increased in all areas of the county. System level boardings of 30.4 per bus service hour in 2000 exceed the target for 2001 set in 1995 of 26.5 boardings per bus service hour.



Note: Ridership includes annual passenger unlinked trips on bus, dial-a-ride, paratransit, vanpool and special services

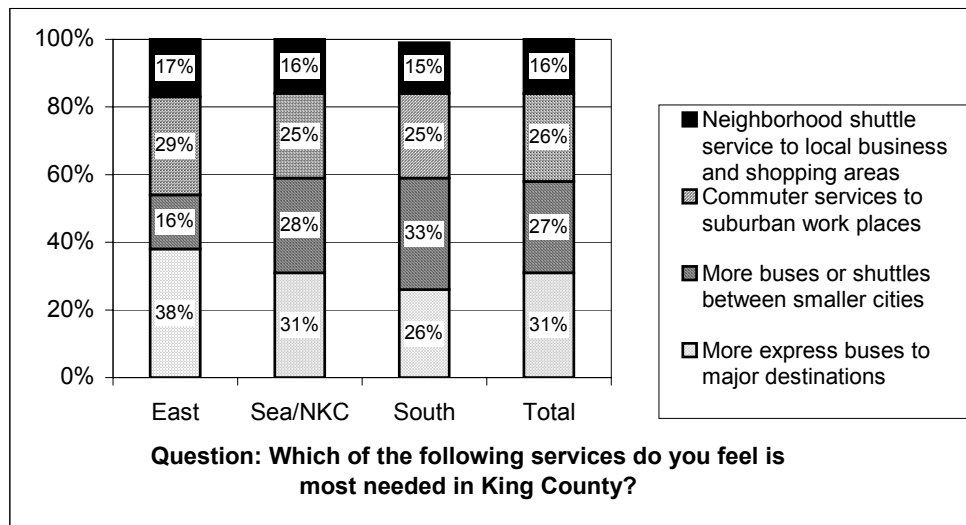
**Figure 2-2 – System Ridership 1995 to 2000**

Transit mobility, as measured by the number of households using transit and boardings per capita, has increased in all areas of the county. The total number of households with residents using transit in the past month (October 2000 survey) increased countywide from 1995 to 2000. Overall usage of the system, measured by boardings per capita, was 58.4 in 2000, already exceeding the plan target for 2001 of 51.0.

## Research

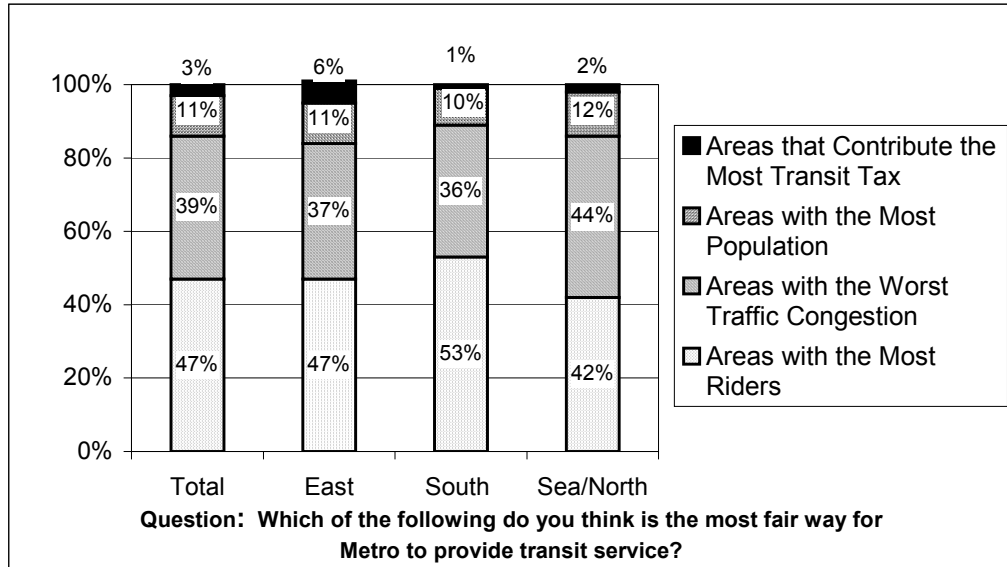
The 2000 census and regional travel data show continued change in countywide travel patterns. When all modes are considered, the data show a decrease in the percentage of King County travel to Seattle in general and to downtown Seattle in particular, with a concurrent rapid increase in suburb-to-suburb and intra-community trips. Even with this trend, downtown Seattle continues to be the strongest market for transit because of its size and the relatively high cost of parking. Consequently, it is important that transit continue to expand service to respond to more dispersed travel destinations, while still focusing on the markets where it can be most competitive, such as downtown Seattle, the University District and downtown Bellevue.

Surveys of King County residents provide an indication of their service priorities for the 2002-2007 six-year plan. Figure 2-3 and 2-4 highlight results by subarea of an early 2001 survey of King County transit riders and non-riders<sup>1</sup>. The relatively strong interest in all kinds of service suggests that, to be successful, the plan should strike a balance among competing needs.



**Figure 2-3 – Most Needed Transit Services**

<sup>1</sup> Six-Year Plan "New Priorities" Study - King County Metro Transit Management Information and Transit Technology (MITT), January 2001



**Figure 2-4 – Most Fair Way to Provide Transit Service**

Increasing ridership will mean both attracting riders for whom using the bus is a choice rather than a necessity, as well as increasing the number of transit trips taken by occasional riders. The aforementioned 2001 survey of King County transit riders and non-riders asking for information on their priorities for new service yielded the following results:

- Respondents in King County would like more transit services—more express buses to major destinations, more buses between smaller cities and more commuter services to suburban worksites.
- A majority of respondents think it is more important to add bus service in as many areas as possible, than it is to add more bus service in a few key areas.
- About half of the respondents want more service between park-and-ride lots and their destinations; the other half would like to see more bus service from within walking distance of their homes to their destinations. Respondents from East and South King County were more inclined to want additional park-and-ride lots.
- Almost 60 percent of respondents would like more bus service added to current routes, while approximately 40 percent prefer to see new bus service to areas where there is currently little or no service.
- The vast majority of respondents think the fairest way to provide transit service is to add it to areas with either the worst traffic congestion or with the most riders.

- Fewer than 15 percent of respondents think the fairest way to provide transit service is to add it to areas with the most population or to areas contributing the most transit taxes.

Research<sup>2</sup> into what attracts transit ridership suggests that:

- Directness of travel and frequency of service are the most important service attributes.
- Respondents are willing to drive to a park-and-ride lot and ride a bus from the lot when the service is provided on a frequent basis
- Riders prefer buses that use dedicated roadways, signal priority, and HOV lanes because they typically provide faster and more reliable service
- Riders would like to be certain that buses will consistently arrive at their destinations on schedule
- Riders expect a high level of comfort and cleanliness at transit centers, shelters, as well as in vehicles
- Riders expect fares to be competitive—significantly lower than the perceived cost of operating and parking a car

## Regional Freeway and Arterial Network Congestion

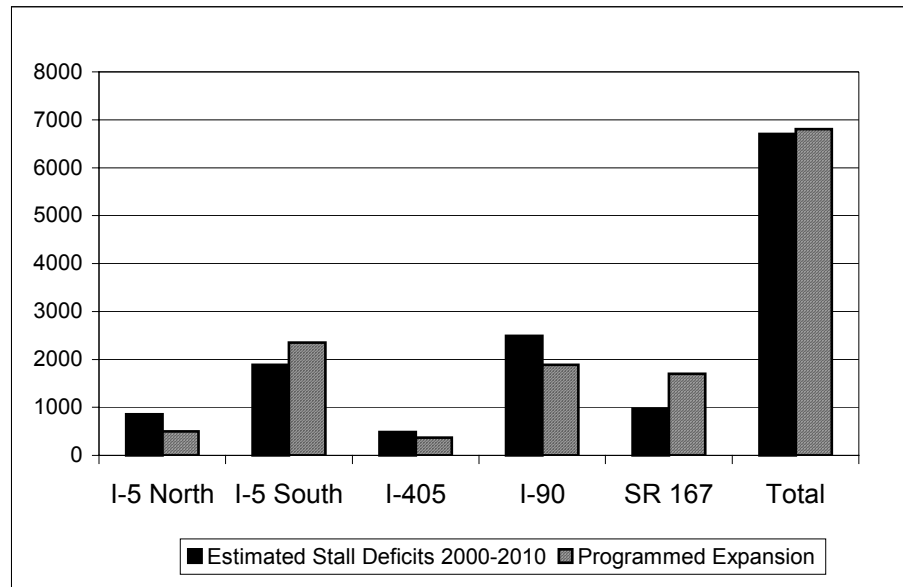
On the King County network of limited access corridors, park-and-ride demand is exceeding available capacity in several locations. A recently completed Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) study<sup>3</sup> concluded that the “unconstrained” demand for park-and-ride spaces would be met by the addition of as many as 12,000 new park-and-ride spaces by the year 2020. During the 2002 to 2007 period, King County Metro and Sound Transit plan a combined increase of about 6,000 parking spaces at park-and-ride facilities, responding to the demand suggested by this study for the period from 2000 to 2010 (see Figure 2-5).

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<sup>2</sup> King County Metro Rider/Non-Rider Survey 2000, Metro Information and Transit Technology

<sup>3</sup> “King County Park & Ride Demand Estimation Study.” Prepared for King County and Washington State Department of Transportation by Parsons Brinckerhoff, January 2001.

As traffic continues to grow, the operating conditions for transit deteriorates without the introduction of priority treatments. This plan addresses the avoidance of service deterioration through the application of bus speed and reliability strategies that are highly dependent upon the commitment and participation of local jurisdictions and other state and local partners to achieve, preservation of funding for schedule maintenance separate from the allocation of hours for new services, and service design.



**Figure 2-5 – Park and Ride Demand and 2000 to 2010 Programmed Expansion  
(King County and Sound Transit Projects Combined)**

## Transit Financing

Since the elimination of Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) revenues with the passage of I-695, King County Metro is now more reliant on sales tax revenue. Because of this, short-term periodic upturns or downturns in the County’s economy will have a greater impact on the public transportation fund than in the past.

The forecast of financial resources for the next six years limits the opportunity for the system to expand. The level of expansion is not known and is dependent on the strength of the economy. The plan addresses this uncertainty by describing a target package of improvements requiring resources beyond those currently forecast and

identifying priorities among different types of service as well as factors to be used in selecting specific investments to be made on an annual basis.

## Subarea Planning

The LRPF divides Metro's service area into three geographic subareas for the purpose of planning and allocating new platform hours. These subareas represent areas where travel and development patterns provide a common basis for planning public transportation. (See Figure 2-1.)

The LRPF states that local jurisdictions are to be actively involved in a collaborative process for planning public transportation. Metro has worked closely with local jurisdictions to ensure that service proposals respond to local comprehensive plans where feasible. Throughout the development of this plan, Metro has worked with groups of elected officials from each subarea, in addition to other stakeholders and the general public. The subarea groups, composed of local elected officials from affected jurisdictions, provided input and guidance on subarea needs, goals, and preferences for service. The groups are (1) the SeaShore Transportation Forum, (2) the Eastside Transportation Program (ETP), and (3) the South County Area Transportation Board (SCATBd).