

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

King County Metro Transit’s strategic plan is divided into three sections: **Introduction**, which provides background and context, summarizes the challenges facing Metro, and describes the strategic planning process; **Pathway to the Future**, which presents Metro’s vision, goals, objectives and strategies; and **Plan Performance Monitoring**, which describes the process Metro will use to track progress.

## SECTION 1.1

### Background and context

#### The importance of public transportation in the Puget Sound region

Public transportation is vitally important to the Puget Sound region. In 2009, Metro provided more than 110 million passenger trips and carried passengers approximately 496 million miles on its fixed-route system. Metro also meets public transportation needs through an array of other products and services (see sidebar).

Public transportation improves the quality of life in the region by providing mobility to those who need or choose to utilize it. It connects commuters to jobs—more than 30 percent of work trips to downtown Seattle are made on transit. It connects students to schools and residents to recreation. It offers travel options to those who cannot drive, and provides assurance to drivers that other mobility options exist should they need them.

Public transportation reduces transportation costs for individual users and families. In 2009, the Seattle area saved approximately \$323 million in fuel and time costs because of the existence of public transportation. This is more than twice the savings of Portland, San Diego, Houston and Dallas<sup>1</sup>.

Transit enhances the region’s economic vitality by freeing up roadway capacity, improving the movement of people and goods. On an average weekday, Metro provides service for more than 113,000<sup>2</sup> people on major state routes. It offers commute options that reduce the need for regional investment in parking infrastructure and roadways. On weekdays in the afternoon, Metro moves more than 21,000<sup>3</sup> people on freeways and major state routes, roughly the equivalent of seven lanes of traffic<sup>4</sup>. And public transportation projects stimulate the economy by creating jobs.

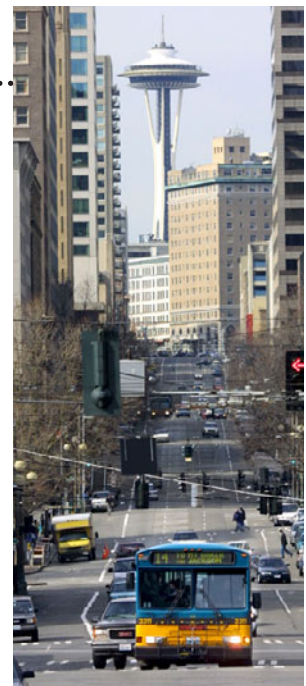
Public transportation will support growth by accommodating the travel needs of a bigger share of the region’s projected population, and is an integral part of the regional growth strategy laid out in the Puget Sound Regional Council’s *Vision 2040* and *Transportation 2040* action plans.

1 Texas Transportation Institute, *Urban Mobility Report 2010* (Texas A&M University System: 2010), 30.

2 Based on spring APC data for Metro service on major state routes, defined as I-405, I-5, I-90, SR-104, SR-164, SR-167, SR-169, SR-181, SR-202, SR-509, SR-513, SR-515, SR-516, SR-520, SR-522, SR-523, SR-526, SR-599, SR-900, SR-908, and SR-99.

3 Based on spring APC data for Metro service for one hour during the PM peak period on I-405, I-5, I-90, SR-520, SR-522 and SR-99.

4 Highway lane equivalent is calculated by taking the total transit riders on I-405, I-5, I-90, SR-520, SR-522 and SR-99 and dividing by average hourly person throughout on each highway, assuming that the average auto occupancy is 1.1.



#### Metro products and services

Metro Transit provides more than 100 million annual fixed-route transit rides—traditional transit service that operates on specific pathways and at specific times—to residents and visitors of King County.

Metro is more than buses. It provides other programs and services that augment the fixed-route transit system, including the largest publicly owned vanpool program in the country, paratransit services, dial-a-ride transit, and other specialized products.

The combination of fixed-route transit service, Metro programs, and other Metro services are referred to as “public transportation” or “Metro’s products and services” in the strategic plan. These terms encompass all of the things that Metro does.

Public transportation also improves the region’s air quality by reducing the number of miles people drive. Energy-efficient transit vehicles contribute to the decrease in transportation emissions.

Metro is committed to improving the quality of public transportation and increasing ridership and use of its products and services, thereby enhancing the entire regional transportation system.



**Metro’s mandate**

The King County Department of Transportation’s Metro Transit Division is directed to perform the “metropolitan public transportation function” as authorized in the Revised Code of Washington 35.58, in alignment with other applicable codes and the financial policies adopted by the Metropolitan King County Council. Metro is required to plan and operate transit services consistent with county, regional, state and federal planning policies.

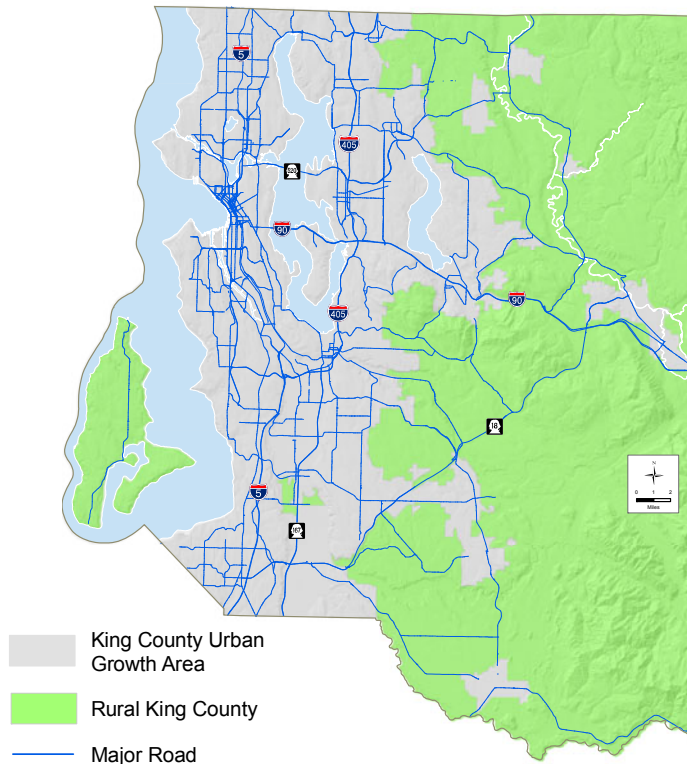
**Countywide planning and policies:** King County Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) are developed by a group of elected officials from King County and the cities and jurisdictions within the county. These policies are consistent with state law, state agency guidance, decisions of the Growth Management Policy Council (GMPC) and the regional growth strategy outlined in *Vision 2040*. The CPPs provide a countywide vision and serve as a framework for each jurisdiction to develop its own comprehensive plan, which must be consistent with the overall vision for the future of King County. Metro’s *Strategic Plan for Public Transportation 2011-2021* is consistent with the *Countywide Planning Policies*, the *King County Comprehensive Plan*, the *King County Strategic Plan*, and the *King County Energy Plan*.

**Regional planning and policies:** State law (RCW 47.80.020) designates the four-county Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) as the Metropolitan Planning

Organization (MPO) and the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) for federal planning purposes. As the region’s MPO, PSRC develops a regional plan and strategies to guide decisions about regional growth management and environmental, economic and transportation issues. As the region’s RTPO, PSRC develops long-range transportation and development plans across multiple jurisdictions and establishes federal funding priorities for the region. Metro participates in the planning process and strives to meet the goals of the regional plans, *Vision 2040* and *Transportation 2040*.

**Washington state planning and policies:** In 1990, the Washington Legislature passed the Growth Management Act (GMA). The GMA requires that the state’s largest and fastest-growing counties conduct comprehensive land-use and transportation planning, to concentrate new growth in compact “urban growth areas,” and protect natural resources and environmentally critical areas. King County’s

FIGURE 1: Urban growth area, King County



UGA is shown in Figure 1. The GMA requires King County to consider population and employment growth targets and land uses when determining the future demand for travel and whether such demand can be met by existing transportation facilities. Metro contributes to the County’s compliance with the GMA by focusing public transportation services on urban growth areas.

**Federal planning and policies:** Metro complies with federal laws that require the public transportation system to be equitable, accessible, and just. Civil rights statutes, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (see sidebar), require that Metro provide public transportation in a manner that does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, or age. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that Metro ensure equal opportunities and access for people with disabilities. A 1994 executive order requires that all federal agencies include environmental justice in their missions. This means that Metro cannot disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations and must ensure full and fair participation by all potentially affected groups. Metro provides public transportation that adheres to these and other federal requirements.



**Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964** provides that “no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

## SECTION 1.2

# Strategic Planning

## Why a strategic plan?

Strategic planning is a process by which an organization assesses how it is doing, figures out where it wants to go, and charts a path to get there. Strategic plans define important goals, set specific directions, and establish the policy framework for the future.

In 2010, King County adopted its first countywide strategic plan, *King County Strategic Plan 2010–2014: Working Together for One King County*. The plan is a key tool in Executive Constantine’s work to reform county government by focusing on customer service, partnerships and ways to bring down the cost of government. Metro’s strategic plan incorporates King County’s guiding principles (see sidebar) and lays out steps for implementing portions of the countywide strategic plan that influence or are influenced by public transportation.

Metro has also used the input of the Regional Transit Task Force in the creation of this plan. The task force was a major regional effort to consider a new policy framework for transit in King County that took place in 2010; it is explained in more detail on pages 10-11. Metro used input from the task force’s work a way to ensure that diverse points of view are well-represented in this strategic plan.



Metro has a particular need to create a strategic plan at this time. Metro’s structural financing problems affect its ability to deliver existing service and address increasing demand for public transportation into the future.

This strategic plan is a way for Metro to define its role in the delivery of King County’s strategic plan, follow through on the recommendations of the Regional



### Guiding principles from King County's strategic plan

The following are King County's guiding principles about the roles and responsibilities of county government:

**Collaborative**—We work together effectively within the organization and in collaboration with other governments, private entities and community partners.

**Service-oriented**—We listen and respond to our customers in a culturally responsive way and prioritize their satisfaction as we do our work.

**Results-focused**—We establish community-driven goals, measure our performance, and report to the public on our success in meeting those goals.

**Accountable**—We are responsive and transparent to the public in our roles, functions and actions as individuals and as a government.

**Innovative**—We are creative, learn from experience and results, and seek out new and efficient ways to solve problems and serve the public.

**Professional**—We uphold the high standards, skills, competence, and integrity of our professions in doing the work of King County government.

**Fair and just**—We serve all residents of King County by promoting fairness and opportunity and eliminating inequities.

Transit Task Force, and navigate the significant challenges it faces, while setting a sustainable course for the future.

### How will this plan be used?

Metro's strategic plan is intended for a variety of audiences. It is meant to do the following:

- Communicate Metro's vision and its intended direction and emphasis over the next 10 years.
- Describe the policy framework in which King County Metro's operational and budget decisions are made.
- Signify Metro's commitment to customer satisfaction and quality service.
- Serve as a baseline to show progress and allow the public to hold Metro accountable.
- Align Metro's employees, services and programs with King County's goals
- Provide a structure to ensure oversight and management of Metro's programs and services.

### What will this plan achieve?

This plan lays out a vision and mission for public transportation services in King County and describes the strategies that will move Metro towards that vision. It also defines desired outcomes and how progress will be measured.

Some elements of this plan—the mission, vision, goals and objectives—are expected to be realized over a long-term time frame. The other element of the plan—the strategies—are expected to be realized in a shorter time frame. This plan will be reviewed periodically as circumstances warrant, and plan elements may be modified, added or substituted if needed.

Although this plan is intended to inform the biennial budget process, funding constraints will limit Metro's ability to implement every strategy in this plan in any given year. Many of the goals and objectives represent ideals that Metro will continually strive to achieve, and which are likely to be included in subsequent plans.

## SECTION 1.3

### Challenges

Metro based this strategic plan in part on an assessment of its current environment and the challenges it faces both within and outside the organization; these are described below. The goals, objectives and strategies articulated later in the plan address these challenges.

#### Regional growth, land use and the economy

King County is the most populous county in the state and the 14th most populous county in the nation. It has a variety of geographic characteristics and diverse communities; land uses, densities and population vary greatly.

The densest parts of the county, where most people live and work, have little room to expand existing transportation infrastructure, so building new highways, roads, and other infrastructure would be both costly and technically challenging. Because of this, the regional growth plans call for more intensive use of existing infrastructure, increasing the number of people using transit services and the proportion of overall regional trips made on transit.

**Regional population and economic growth:** In the past 10 years, King County’s population has grown by 11 percent. Cities throughout the county have seen population growth and have annexed large areas that previously were unincorporated. Most cities in the County have increased in population since 2000. Demand for public transportation has increased along with population growth.

More growth is expected throughout the region. The Puget Sound Regional Council estimates there will be an additional 1.5 million people in the region by 2040—a 42 percent increase. Growth in the number of jobs is also expected. An estimated 1.2 million new jobs will come to the region by 2040—a 57 percent increase since 2000. More people and jobs (shown in Figure 2) mean that Metro will have an opportunity to serve more riders and major employment centers.

This growth will be focused in King County’s centers (see sidebar on page 6). The centers referred to in Metro’s strategic plan are shown in Figure 4.

Public transportation ridership tends to fluctuate with changes in fuel prices, population and employment levels, and other changes. As shown in Figure 3, Metro’s ridership grew each year between 2002 and 2008, culminating in 2008 with its highest annual ridership of more than 118 million boardings. At that time, Metro’s ridership growth per service hour was outpacing that of the 10 largest transit agencies in the nation. Ridership has decreased since then, in part because of high unemployment. As the economy recovers and employment levels return to normal, Metro’s ridership is expected to increase again.

**Ridership changes:** Changing demographics, such as income, age, and ethnicity, as well as access to transit and household density, also have an impact on King County’s transit system. For example, King County’s population is aging; people 65 and older now account for 10 percent of the people who live here. An aging population may rely more on public transportation for its travel needs than a younger population would.

King County is also becoming more diverse in its ethnic, cultural and language makeup, and that diversity is increasingly spreading to more areas of King County. Metro’s public transportation services will be called upon to address gaps in mobility by serving people who have limited transportation options, including seniors, youth, students, people with disabilities, people of color, those with limited English proficiency and economically disadvantaged communities.

FIGURE 2: Puget Sound region projected population and employment growth 2000-2040

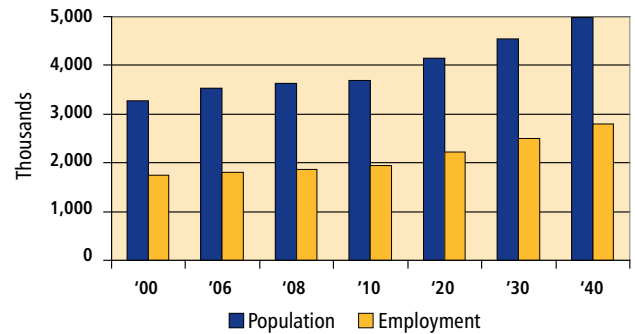
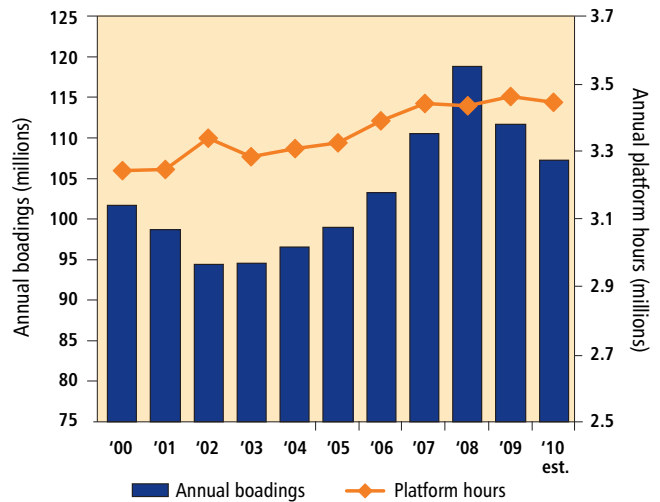


FIGURE 3: Metro ridership 2000-2010



## Centers

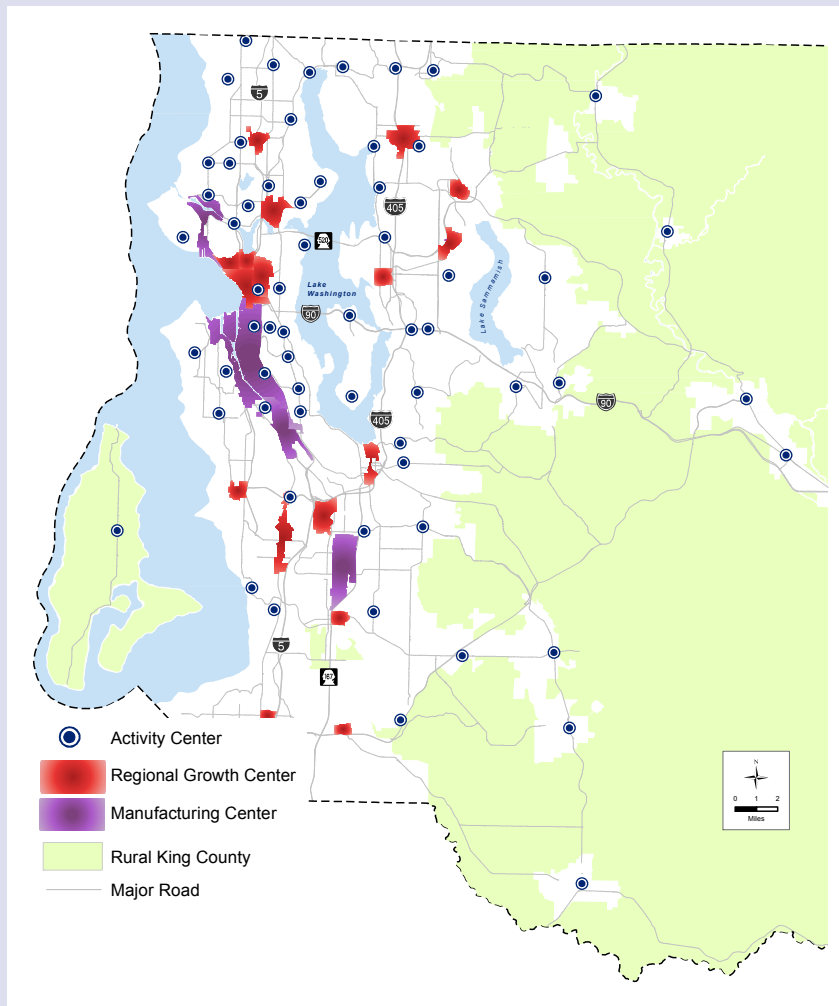
Centers are the hallmark of PSRC's *Vision 2040* and its Regional Growth Strategy. Designated regional growth centers have been identified for housing and employment growth, as well as for regional funding. Regional manufacturing/industrial centers are locations for increased employment.

In addition to PSRC's designated centers, Metro has also identified "transit activity centers" in King County. Transit activity centers are areas of the county that are important for Metro to serve and that are typically associated with higher levels of transit use. Transit activity centers are further explained in the King County Metro Service Guidelines.

Regional growth, manufacturing/industrial, and transit activity centers are collectively referred to as "centers" in this strategic plan.



FIGURE 4: Regional Growth, Manufacturing/Industrial and Transit Activity Centers



## Funding shortfall

**Increased ridership:** In 2006, voters approved a ballot measure known as Transit Now to increase public transportation services in King County. This measure included funding for five RapidRide lines, additional service for high-ridership routes and rapidly developing areas, service partnerships with cities and businesses, and expanded Access and ridesharing services. Between 2007 and 2009, Metro was on schedule for implementing these improvements.

Transit Now investments in public transportation were timely. In 2007 and 2008, Metro experienced unprecedented growth in ridership, largely because people changed their travel habits in response to higher gas prices. At that time, Metro was growing, with ridership increasing more than seven percent each year. Buses were full—people accustomed to getting a seat on the bus found themselves standing, and people used to standing on the bus found themselves passed by. Metro simply could not keep up with the increasing demand for service.

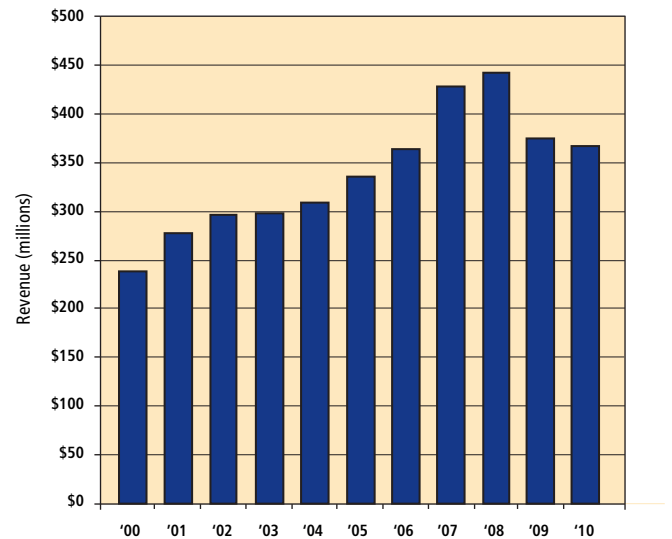
**Financial challenges:** Even though the economy was booming and ridership was setting all-time records, Metro struggled financially. The same factors that boosted public transportation ridership also increased Metro's operating costs. High fuel costs, together with increasing wages and benefits, impacted Metro's ability to respond to increasing demands for public transportation.

Revenue from sales tax (shown in Figure 5), which makes up nearly 60 percent of Metro's operating funds, is vulnerable to the fluctuations in the economy. Metro experienced a sharp revenue drop of more than \$130 million for the 2008-2009 biennium, which further exacerbated the challenges Metro was facing with higher costs and increased ridership. Metro was able to delay reductions in transit service by increasing fares, reducing operating expenses and scaling back capital projects. These efforts enabled Metro to maintain service levels and sustain modest service growth.

Sales tax revenues continued to fall in the wake of the recession, creating an even larger gap in the 2010-2011 biennium budget. Metro avoided large reductions in transit service by deferring expansion of bus service—including proposed Transit Now investments, making non-service related cuts, increasing transit funding through a King County property tax, increasing fares, using fleet replacement reserves, and implementing findings of a transit performance audit (see sidebar). These actions, along with some temporary, one-time use of reserves and capital fund reductions, were collectively known as the nine-point plan and allowed Metro to balance its budget for the 2010/2011 biennium.

Although the economy appeared to be recovering in early 2011, sales tax revenues are not expected to be greater than what was collected in 2008 until 2014. Recent forecasts predict that sales tax revenues will continue to be well below previous projections. Based on the County's updated revenue forecast through 2015, Metro may have to make significant transit service reductions as soon as 2012 to balance its budget.

FIGURE 5: Annual sales tax revenues 2000-2010



### 2009 Performance Audit of Transit

In 2009, the King County Auditor's Office released a report with 34 recommendations for ways that Metro could be more efficient and save money. Metro is actively implementing these recommendations, finding efficiencies in the way it schedules buses and operators, performs maintenance, monitors performance, provides Paratransit services, and many other aspects of public transportation. In 2010, over \$10 million in ongoing costs have been reduced as a result.

**Structural deficit:** From 2009 to 2015, Metro’s cumulative loss from lower-than-expected sales tax revenues is projected to be more than \$1 billion. Despite all of the budget actions Metro has taken, it would have to fill a multi-year gap of nearly \$315 million from 2012-2015 just to maintain current service levels and complete service expansions promised to voters in the 2006 Transit Now initiative.



Without additional resources, Metro is facing potential ongoing cuts of approximately 600,000 annual service hours—about 20 percent of the current system. By 2015, countywide bus services would be dramatically reduced, resulting in a system that is 20 percent smaller than in 2009.

These potential service reductions would have a dramatic impact on riders and public transportation use in King County. Difficult decisions would have to be made about where and when services would be reduced.

### **The environment**

Transportation accounts for nearly half of all greenhouse-gas emissions in Washington. To reduce emissions, significant changes in how we live and travel are necessary. Metro can play a major role by providing transportation options that encourage public transportation ridership and help reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled. In order for the shift from single-occupant vehicles to public transportation to occur in a way that will have an impact on climate change, more areas of the county must adopt compact, dense land uses and encourage development that is more easily served by transit.

Metro also supports King County energy policies that seek to minimize the environmental and carbon footprint of its own operations. Metro does this by operating fuel-efficient vehicles, applying sustainable practices at Metro facilities, and reducing energy consumption. Reducing energy consumption will also help Metro financially. The dynamics of fuel supply, as demonstrated by the 2008 spike in gas prices, are likely to continue affecting transportation costs.



### **Customer service and satisfaction**

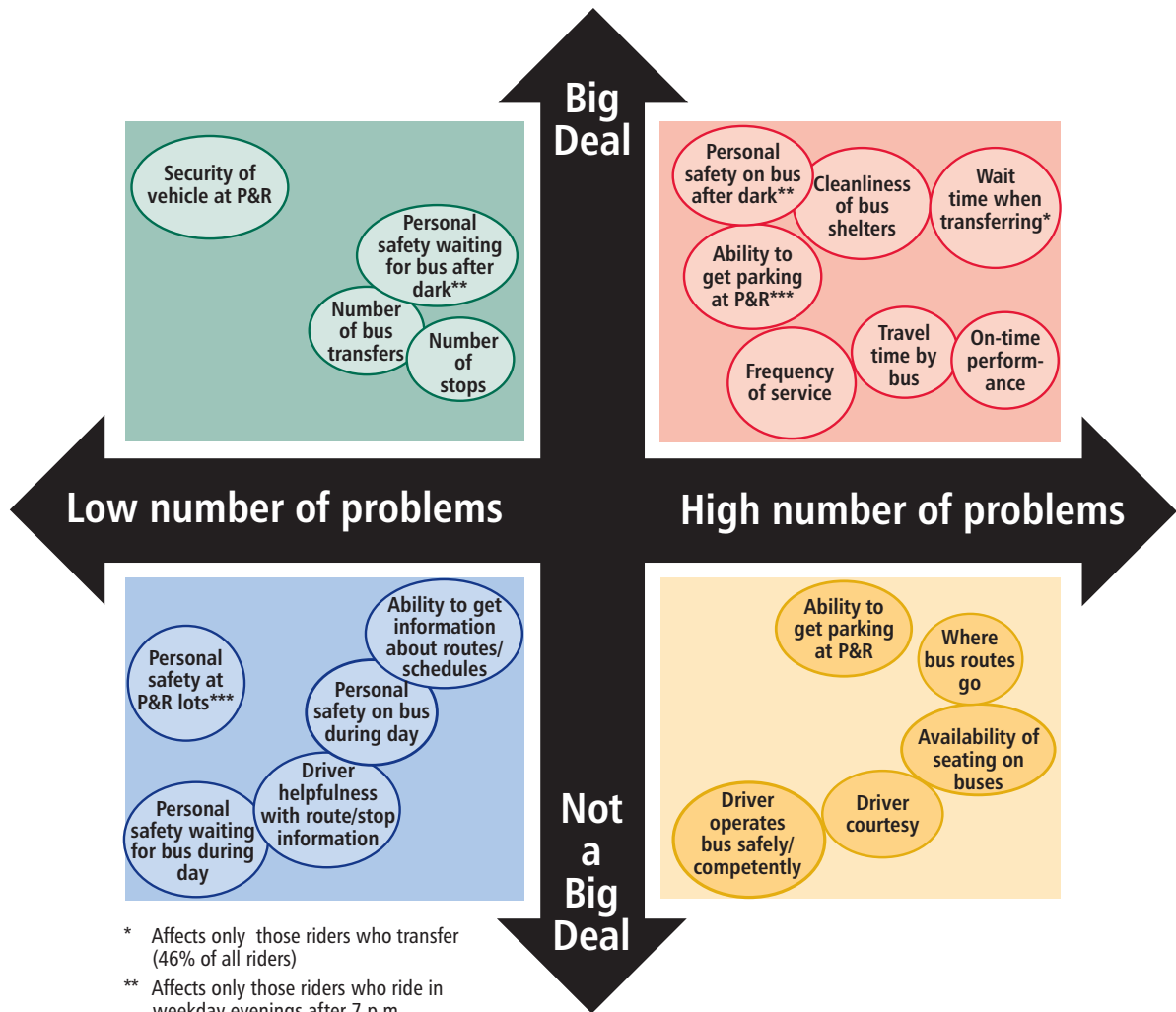
Maintaining and improving customer satisfaction with Metro services is an ongoing process. Every experience a customer has on a Metro bus, at a Metro facility, or with Metro employees and information services affects perceptions about the quality of public transportation. Metro strives to ensure that a customer’s public transportation experience is positive at every stage of a trip. Metro reaches out to customers for input into service and product design and to obtain feedback about how well its services are meeting customer needs and expectations. Public meetings, correspondence, direct interactions and an annual telephone survey of riders help Metro gather planning input and measure how well it is doing in the eyes of its customers.

Figure 6 illustrates the issues that have the most impact on customer satisfaction. Vertically, the chart shows which issues are most important to riders. Horizontally, the chart shows the frequency at which customers raise these concerns. Issues in the top right corner, such as long travel times on the bus and poor on-time performance, are most important to riders and are cited frequently. Metro is working towards improving the factors identified in this chart.

Improving quality is important to increasing customer satisfaction, but budget constraints make it difficult for the agency to do so. Metro must ensure that during



FIGURE 6: What is important to Metro riders



\* Affects only those riders who transfer (46% of all riders)  
 \*\* Affects only those riders who ride in weekday evenings after 7 p.m. (21% of all riders)  
 \*\*\* Affects only those riders who use park-and-ride lots (29% of all riders)

times of significant change in the public transportation system, the decision-making process is clear, transparent and based on criteria and objectives that are easy for customers to understand. Whether Metro is expanding or reducing the public transportation system, a transparent decision-making process will help build trust and acceptance of the decisions made. Responding to customers, including the public in the decision-making process, and maintaining quality service are crucial ways for Metro to increase ridership and improve customer service and satisfaction.

**Evolving transportation system**

The Puget Sound region’s transportation system is constantly changing and adapting to the mobility needs of its residents. The many plans and proposals for improving and expanding the transportation system will present opportunities and challenges for Metro.

Metro works closely with other regional transit and transportation agencies to plan and provide efficient, integrated travel options that enhance public transportation services in King County. Metro coordinates most closely with Sound Transit, Pierce Transit, Community Transit, Washington State Ferries and the King County Ferry



District. Metro also works with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), PSRC, various local and regional jurisdictions, and businesses such as Microsoft that provide direct transit service to their employees.

Metro collaborates on some of the region's most important transportation projects to ensure that public transportation continues to play a vital role in the region's broader transportation system. These projects include the following:



- **Sound Transit's Link light rail:** In 2009, Sound Transit opened the Central Link light rail line connecting Seattle-Tacoma International Airport with downtown Seattle. Metro undertook an extensive public engagement effort as part of this project and redesigned transit service to better connect to light rail.

Link will be extended throughout the region over the next 10 years, reaching the University District in 2016 and Northgate by 2021, and connecting Overlake and downtown Seattle beginning in 2021. Sound Transit also plans to extend Link south along the Pacific Highway South/SR-99 corridor. The growth of the light rail system offers opportunities for Metro to provide better connections for riders to and from this high-capacity transit service, improving the overall efficiency of the region's transportation system.



- **Major highway projects:** Public transportation is an essential part of major transportation projects in the Puget Sound region. Metro provides public transportation service to mitigate the impacts of major projects and is also affected by changes to the transportation infrastructure in the region. Public transportation will play a major role in the Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Replacement Project and the SR 520 Bridge Replacement project, as well as other transportation infrastructure projects in the next 10 years.

As the region's public transportation system evolves, Metro will continue to actively engage with regional, local and state entities as well as businesses and communities to build an effective system.

#### ■ SECTION 1.4

## Strategic Plan Development

This strategic plan builds on past planning efforts and policies. In early 2010, the King County Council and Executive formed the Regional Transit Task Force, made up of 31 members (28 voting and three non-voting) who represented a broad diversity of interests and perspectives from across the county. Metro's strategic plan is based in part on the policy framework and recommendations that came out of the task force process.

### Regional Transit Task Force charge

The primary charge to the task force was to recommend a policy framework that reflects the prioritization of key system design factors (see sidebar on page 11) and to make recommendations about public transportation system design and function. The overall framework was to include:

- Concurrence with, or proposed changes to, the vision and mission of Metro
- Criteria for systematically growing the public transportation system to achieve the vision



- Criteria for systematically reducing the public transportation system should revenues not be available to sustain it
- State and federal legislative agenda issues to achieve the vision
- Strategies for increasing the efficiency of Metro.

### Process and public involvement

The Regional Transit Task Force conducted its work over a seven-month period, with 12 full-group meetings and eight subgroup meetings. Task force meetings were open to public comment, and a webpage posted on the County's website included an online comment form. The task force set aside time at each meeting to hear the thoughts, ideas, and opinions of anyone who wished to speak, and these comments were included in meeting summaries.

### Task Force recommendations

The task force was unanimous in approving seven recommendations. The major themes are described below. For the full version of the recommendations, visit [www.kingcounty.gov/transittaskforce](http://www.kingcounty.gov/transittaskforce).

- **Transparency and clarity:** The task force recommendations suggest that Metro provide more transparency and clarity to the public on decision-making processes. To this end, the task force suggested that Metro create and adopt a new set of performance measures and clear and transparent guidelines to be used in service allocation decisions.
- **Cost control:** The task force recommendations suggest that Metro control costs and establish a sustainable financial structure that will work over time.
- **Sustainable funding:** The task force recommendations suggest that legislation be pursued to ensure that Metro has a more sustainable financial base and can grow in the future.
- **Productivity, social equity, and geographic value:** The task force recommendations suggest that Metro emphasize productivity, ensure social equity, and provide geographic value in service reduction and growth decisions.
- **Mission and vision:** The task force recommendations suggest that Metro revise its mission statement and create a vision statement in its strategic plan.

### Transit system design factors

The Council asked the task force to consider six design factors; the task force added one more. The following summarizes the Regional Transit Task Force definitions of these factors:

**Factor 1: Land use:** To support regional and local growth plans by concentrating transit service coverage and higher service levels in corridors where residential and job density is greatest.

**Factor 2: Social equity and environmental justice:** To support social equity and environmental justice by providing mobility options to those who have no or limited transportation options.

**Factor 3: Financial sustainability:** To support financial sustainability through transit that achieves higher ridership and fare revenues combined with lower costs per rider.

**Factor 4: Geographic value:** To support geographic value by facilitating service allocation decisions (both for reductions and growth) that are perceived as "fair" throughout the county. This involves balancing access with productivity; maintaining some relationship between the tax revenue created in a subarea and the distribution of services; and providing access to job centers and other destinations that are essential to countywide economic vitality.

**Factor 5: Economic development:** To support economic development by achieving the largest number of work trips at all times of the day and all days of the week via transit.

**Factor 6: Productivity and efficiency:** To support productivity and efficiency by focusing on a system that results in high productivity and service efficiency based on performance measures for different types of transit services.

**Factor 7: Environmental sustainability:** To support environmental sustainability by reducing greenhouse-gas emissions by reducing vehicle travel, reducing congestion, and supporting compact development.

