

Metro Service Guidelines Task Force

Meeting Summary

April 1, 2015, 3:00 – 6:00 PM

Bellevue City Hall, Room 1E-108

Task Force members present: Nancy Backus, Amy Biggs, Vic Bishop, Josh Brown, Tim Burgess (represented by a staff member), Fred Butler, John Chelminiak, Suzette Cooke, Lauren Craig, Chris Eggen, Mahnaz Eshetu, Jim Ferrell, George Frasier, Patrick Green, Josh Kavanagh (represented by Phil Miller), Matt Koltnow, Scott Kubly, Matt Larson, John Marchione, Gordon McHenry, Lynn Moody, Shefali Ranganathan, Tom Rasmussen, Jon Scholes, Edna Shim, Jim Stanton; *Ex-Officio members:* Kevin Desmond; *Facilitator:* John Howell (Cedar River Group)

Members not present: Paul Bachtel, Hilary Franz, David Freiboth, Jonathan Porter, Carla Saulter; *Ex-Officio:* Mike Harbour

Guest: King County Executive Dow Constantine

Presenters: Victor Obeso (Deputy General Manager, Planning and Customer Services, King County Metro); Chris O’Claire (Manager, Strategy, Policy and Performance Management, King County Metro)

Welcome

King County Executive Dow Constantine thanked the task members for their willingness to serve. The task force is part of the County’s continuous improvement philosophy. Metro developed the Service Guidelines based on recommendation of the 2010 Regional Transit Task Force to emphasize productivity and fairness in serving the region, which spans urban, suburban and rural areas. The Service Guidelines Task Force has the important role of reviewing the guidelines and their implementation, and making recommendations for improvement.

The County Executive spoke of the challenges of and progress in providing transit services for our rapidly growing region. Metro has been responding with new services such as Rapid Ride, which enables providing more transit per dollar, and by working with local communities to develop alternative services, such as in Snoqualmie Valley, and pilots, such as on Mercer Island. While fares need to be adequate, it is important not to price out those who rely on transit. Accordingly, Metro has introduced the ORCA Lift program, which is the nation’s first income-based fare system. The move from cash to electronic fare payment is increasing efficiency. Metro is working with Sound Transit to create a better integrated transit system and, as new light rail stations come on line, will continue modifying the bus network to be productive. The County Executive said he looks forward to receiving the task force’s recommendations.

Meeting Objectives

John Howell said that the meeting's objectives were to focus on three of the five charges to the task force: how performance is measured, how alternative services are implemented, and how geographic value is included in the guidelines.

Presentation and Discussion: Performance Measures at Metro

Chris O'Claire and Victor Obeso provided an overview of performance measurement in Metro's planning, how Metro evaluates performance, the Alternative Services Demonstration Program, and examples from other agencies (see presentation slides, "Performance Measurement, Geographic Value and Alternative Services").

In response to task force members' questions, Ms. O'Claire and Mr. Obeso provided the following clarifications and additional information:

- *Area included in "Seattle Core":* The routes classified as "Seattle Core" serve downtown Seattle, First Hill, Capitol Hill, South Lake Union, the University District, or Uptown. About half these "Seattle Core" routes are within Seattle and half also serve areas outside Seattle. Seattle Core routes account for 70 percent of service hours and 80 percent of boardings.
- *Performance measures:* Metro does not use revenue hours as a measure. Use of platform hours represents the entirety of cost in the system. The two measures balance different system values. Rides per platform hour values high numbers of people getting on and off the bus.. Passenger miles per platform mile values passenger trips that occur over longer distances.
- *Performance of peak vs. off-peak service:* In the graphs showing performance by peak, off-peak and night, the off-peak routes serving Seattle Core show better performance because Metro sizes the service to the demand and the off peak time period occurs over a longer time span. There are fewer buses operating in the mid-day and weekends. Some of the peak period buses are not full or are deadheading.
- *Infrastructure costs:* Metro does not "allocate" infrastructure costs to routes. The agency does incorporate a portion of system costs in the performance measures, but does not include the cost of vehicle maintenance and storage.
- *Alternative services and Access:* Access is paratransit for persons with disabilities who are unable to use regular transit service. It is federally required. The alternative services do not change the requirements for Access. Community partnerships are key to developing alternative services.
- *Union agreement:* Not all services fall within the total cap on DART services of 3 percent of the total system size (105,000 hours), as negotiated with in the union contract. There is flexibility for alternative services.

Task force members made the following requests:

- *Revenue hours as a measure:* Two task force members asked about the potential for using revenue hours as a performance measure.

- *Rationale for choice of metrics:* There were requests for a written explanation of why Metro has chosen the two performance measures of passenger miles/platform mile and rides/platform hour.

There were a number of questions regarding the exercise of looking at performance with Metro's services classified by using the five service types Denver RTD uses, instead of using Seattle Core and Non-Seattle Core by peak, off-peak and night. Ms. O'Claire's responses to questions were as follows:

- The chart using Denver's service types still uses Metro's two performance measures. Denver uses different performance measures.
- Denver puts its rural services within their "Suburban Local" category.
- Metro's A, B and F Rapid Ride lines would be classified as Urban Local in Denver's service types, and Rapid Rides C, D and E would be CBD Local.
- Other transit agencies use different service categories; agencies also use terms differently.

Task force members offered the following comments regarding the service types comparison:

- *"Peer" agencies:* Denver's transit system is regional like Metro's, but its governance is different. This suggests caution in making comparisons and identifying "peer" agencies.
- *Alternative services and service types:* Looking at Metro's services using Denver's service types leaves out the alternative services so is not an apples-to-apples comparison.
- *Measures:* It would be useful to look at the measures Denver uses, as well as the service types. Perhaps the Denver service types do not fit well into the two types of measurement Metro uses.
- *Value of service types:* Service type may not be as important as the type of trip and how we value those trips.
- *Above average results:* It is interesting that using the Denver service types, only CBD Local and Express services exceed the system average, and only CBD exceeds the average on both performance measures. The results raise questions about what we value more.
- *Density:* The chart seems to say that lower density areas, including those in Seattle, are not very productive. It is surprising that the Express type is not higher performing.
- *Usefulness:* It is hard to use the overlay on Denver's service types to make a recommendation; it is not clear what the data tell us.

Discussion

Regarding performance measures used by other agencies, Mr. Obeso said that all agencies use measures involving some combination of the number of people riding, how far the transit system takes them, and how much it costs. Kevin Desmond added that the basic choice is between efficiency/cost and effectiveness measures. Metro uses effectiveness measures, that is, how well it is using its resources.

In response to a question as to whether Metro has a baseline for service, Mr. Obeso said that there is no minimum level of service defined; Metro aims to maintain an investment in all areas by connecting all activity centers.

Task force members offered the following overall comments:

- It is troubling that the performance measures appear to slant toward those who live the closest.
- Alternative services raise some questions: DART is currently compared to fixed services—is that fair? Other alternative services do not have evaluation measures yet.
- Two categories and two service types seem like too few.
- Does using Seattle Core and Non-Seattle Core fit with the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) Vision 2040? This categorization might have fit in the past, but things have changed.
- The basic question is one of values or purpose. What is the important purpose for transit to serve—Coverage? Moving as many people as efficiently as possible? The dual purposes of getting commuters to work and moving people around the whole region? Are we are creating a system only going to Seattle or serving residents anywhere going to areas of employment or to other needs?
- Creating a lot of categories might not serve the responsibility to make the best use of resources. Ultimately density is the driver of performance and cost. We should consider the use of land and projected growth patterns.
- People who have paid into the system need to get something out of it. Everyone’s vote will be needed on the next tax measure.

Presentation and Discussion: Geographic Value at Metro

Chris O’Claire and Victor Obeso provided an overview of geographic value in Metro’s planning process and in the service guidelines (see presentation slides, “Performance Measurement, Geographic Value and Alternative Services,” starting at slide 22). The basic idea of geographic value is that everyone throughout the county should find value from transit services, including in terms of more road space because transit riders are not in their cars.

In response to task force members’ questions, Ms. O’Claire and Mr. Obeso provided the following clarifications and additional information:

- *Non-Seattle Core*: Not separating out the Non-Seattle Core would have put many of those services in the bottom 25 percent in the performance measures. In 2014, the Non-Seattle Core was 30 percent of the service hours and 40 percent of the investments.
- *Criteria for identifying corridors*: The criteria used to identify the 112 corridors are: connecting regional growth centers; or connecting transit activity centers. Metro re-analyzes the corridors and centers and annually.
- *New transit activity centers*: Potential centers can be nominated and must meet one of the criteria for current centers, but still must meet the three criteria: pathway on arterial roadways; results in a new primary connection between two centers; and results in at least a 30-minute service frequency. Establishing a new center adds a new priority for investment. Many of the current centers include a Sound Transit station.
- *Regional Growth and Manufacturing Centers*: All these centers have at least one Metro route. Ten of the smaller cities in King County do not have a regional growth center. Redmond and Seattle have more than one.

- *Example of preserving coverage:* There was low productivity in the Snoqualmie Valley; running a 60-foot bus from Duvall to Woodinville was costly. Metro worked with the community and reinvested the service hours into the Snoqualmie Valley Shuttle, using a 14-seat van. The service has been well accepted, with the shuttle now carrying 98 riders per day. It is still early to judge the cost difference; it may be more per trip and less per hour.
- *Cost of Park-and-Rides:* Metro does not allocate a specific benefit to Park-and-Rides in the guidelines analysis, but when they are located on a corridor that is a primary connection between two regional centers, they get maximum geographic value points. In addition, when a route has high ridership, this is also accounted for in the guidelines analysis. In the Renton example, the route operates all day, with people getting on and off in both directions.
- *Leased parking lots:* The permanent Park-and-Rides are 90 percent of the parking spaces in the system; leased lots are 10 percent.
- *Service changes and Park-and-Rides:* Service changes are made based on the performance of service, whether or not a Park-and-Ride is available. In many places the Park-and-Rides are not located ideally—they were created because Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) owns the land or the land was available.
- *Connection to revenue generated:* Metro does not consider the revenue generated in an area in its transit planning. It is a regional system with taxes collected regionally. The 85 activity centers provide value across the county, whether by providing transit service or reducing congestion.

Discussion

Task force members offered the following comments:

- *Activity centers:* Consider connection to the regional transportation network, such as to Sound Transit facilities, as another factor in identifying transit activity centers.
- *Partnerships:* There is great opportunity in partnerships to retain a route, add new routes or pilot a route. Metro should look for ways to build the partnership program.
- *Value of Park-and-Rides:* In the Renton example, there is value in the Renton Park-and-Ride to Renton and communities to the south beyond the label of “Seattle Core.” The underlying issue is the value residents get.
- *Evaluation of Park-and-Rides:* The Park-and-Ride portfolio should be evaluated to determine which are performing and which are not, and how best to align with the transportation system. The lots developed over 30 years are not the right locations and other areas, such as the juncture of Rt. 18 and I-90, need a Park-and-Ride.
- *Messaging value:* Metro needs to do better in explaining the value of its services to areas of the county that provide tax revenue but do not have a lot of transit service. Transit-supported investments, such as allocating right of way and commute trip reduction, need to be taken into account, also.

Mr. Desmond recommended that the suggestion to evaluate the Park-and-Ride locations go on the list for the Long-Range Plan. In response to a question about when Metro might start making changes based

on the task force's recommendations, he said that policy recommendations will go to the County Council in December 2015 and once adopted, will go into effect immediately.

Next Steps

The next meeting will be on Thursday, April 30, 4:00 to 7:00 PM, at the Bellevue City Hall. It will explore social equity in the guidelines. There will also be more discussion about what the system aims to achieve and the concept of value.

Regarding the schedule of task force meetings, Mr. Howell said that several members have conflicts for the final meeting scheduled for June 16. There may be a need to change either that date or time.

Public Comment

There was no one present who wished to provide public comment.