

Metro Service Guidelines Task Force

Meeting Summary

May 21, 2015, 3:00 – 6:00 PM

Bellevue City Hall, Room 1E-108

Task Force members present: Paul Bachtel, Amy Biggs, Vic Bishop, Josh Brown, Tim Burgess, Fred Butler, John Chelminiak, Suzette Cooke, Dorene Cornwell, Lauren Craig, Chris Eggen, Mahnaz Eshetu, Jim Ferrell, Hilary Franz, George Frasier, Patrick Green, Josh Kavanagh, Matt Koltnow, Scott Kubly, Matt Larson, John Marchione, Gordon McHenry, Lynn Moody, Shefali Ranganathan, Tom Rasmussen, Carla Saulter, Jon Scholes, Edna Shim; *Ex-Officio members:* Kevin Desmond, Mike Harbour; *Facilitator:* John Howell (Cedar River Group)

Members not present: Nancy Backus, Kevin Desmond, Hilary Franz, David Freiboth, Jim Stanton

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

Welcome, Meeting Objectives and Recap of Charge

John Howell welcomed task force members and said that this meeting would include a brief presentation by Metro staff, but that the majority of the time would be for the committee to begin discussing geographic value and service types. Mr. Howell acknowledged that the discussion at the last task force meeting got into more detail than needed, and that the discussion questions were too broad. However, he thought that the final portion of the last meeting was very helpful in beginning to address the social equity issues identified in the task force charge. He and the staff team have provided more specific questions for the task force discussion at this meeting.

Mr. Howell reminded task force members of their charge and the key questions it asks of them:

- How should Metro group the services for evaluation purposes?
- Are the values of Social Equity and Geographic Value getting implemented in a way that is producing fair results?
- How should Alternative Services, park-and-rides, and partner investments be integrated into the way in which Metro makes decisions about service investments or reductions?

Review Social Equity Summary

Mr. Howell directed attention to a two-page summary of the ideas that have emerged from the task force’s discussion so far about social equity (“Follow Up on April 30 Task Force Meeting Discussion about Social Equity”). He asked if the ideas were captured accurately and if anything was missing. Task force members offered the following comments:

Missing:

- Travel time—how long it takes a resident to get from home to his/her job center, medical center or education facility.

- Results from the way the Guidelines have been applied: How has applying the Guidelines changed the service for low-income and minority residents? This information would help the task force to decide what, if any, changes are needed. There was a suggestion to compare the Metro system in Spring 2014 against Spring 2015.

Suggested changes in the summary:

- Keep race as an emphasis; frequently there is a connection with being transit dependent.
- Household size should be taken into consideration.
- Broaden the definition of minority to include foreign-born or analyze this category of riders separately.
- Consider as “transit dependent” not just those who use transit to reach their jobs, but also to reach shopping, medical facilities and education.
- In public engagement, ask about the needs for transit, not just the barriers to using it. Consider whether the design of service prevents people from using it.
- Use the planning process to reach hard-to-reach communities, particularly transit-dependent residents who often do not participate in open houses or other forums.
- Collect travel behavior data about the transit use of low-income riders, perhaps through the use of ORCA Lift information.

Mr. Howell will revise the summary on social equity based on the task force’s comments.

Geographic Value and Its Application

Mr. Howell reminded the task force of the definition of “geographic value” (see handout, “Geographic Value Definitions”). Victor Obeso presented several slides showing how geographic value has guided service reductions and investments (see presentation, “Geographic value: How is it reflected in the application of service reductions and investments?”).

In response to task force members’ questions, Mr. Obeso provided the following additional information:

- ***Effect of Seattle’s investment:*** With the City of Seattle’s voter-approved investment in service hours, Metro will be able to meet the investment needs identified as investment priorities #1 (passenger crowding) and 2 (schedule reliability) within Seattle—to maintain an acceptable quality of service.
- ***Investment needs:*** The largest portion of 2014 investment needs identified by the service guidelines were on existing corridors. The investment needs are based on analysis of land use (connecting centers), geographic value and social equity.
- ***Impact of projected growth:*** Nearly 40 percent of the investment need on corridors identified as being below their target service levels, are located in South King County.

Task force members’ discussion included the following ideas:

- ***Public will and equity:*** Several Task force members commented that the lower percentage of hours to be invested on the Eastside and the level of reductions last year do not help to build public support in those areas for future funding initiatives. More resources are needed for

transit, so voters will need to feel they get value from the system. Other task force members pointed out that the guideline refers to geographic *value*, not geographic *equity*.

- **Reductions:** There were comments that some service reductions could be counterproductive. If buses are so infrequent or inconvenient that people do not ride them, the corridor will fail on productivity.
- **Points for geographic value:** There were questions about how the allocation of points between Non-Seattle Core and Seattle Core reflect geographic value. Task force members questioned whether being a primary connection between centers is the right measure of a corridor, and whether the points for geographic value described all the things we consider valuable. There were also concerns that points are given as either 0 or 5, or 0-10, and suggestions to scale points for geographic value. A task force member noted that the service reductions were greater in East King County than in South, seemingly driven by social equity.
- **Regional differences:** Members noted that it is difficult to focus on investments in specific areas of the county when many people regularly travel between areas. Others said that geographic value depends on where one lives, and noted that east-west travel between suburban centers is not well served since it looks less productive even though it would tie job centers together. To have more service in suburban areas would require increasing the service standards on frequency. Another member commented that it is difficult to compare the need for service in Seattle with the suburbs because of the difference in density. Although residents in Seattle can be more transit-reliant, it is also less affordable to live in the city because of housing costs. The county is rapidly changing and the Guidelines must keep up with the changing needs of transit dependent residents.
- **Local investments:** There were several suggestions to take into account the transit-supportive infrastructure investments local jurisdictions have taken, such as signal priorities, channelizing traffic, creating park-and-rides, sidewalks, and access improvements. Also, there should be a way to reward cities that are doing the right things to increase densities. Task force members noted that possible infrastructure investments by Metro and by local jurisdictions, such as park-and-rides, could be perceived as providing geographic value.
- **Express services with local connections:** A task force member said that it is a challenge for long-haul express services to be considered Seattle Core because they go into downtown Seattle, but serve key stops between other centers before going to Seattle.
- **Alternative services:** There was a suggestion to evaluate alternative services separately since they serve distinctly different markets than other Non-Seattle Core corridors.
- **Factors to consider:** A task force member suggested that the Guidelines should account for mobility between urban centers—a combination of ridership and travel time, measured as the number of urban centers one can get to within an hour. Another member suggested accessibility—how many things people can get to in a corridor, such as jobs and activity centers. Another thought that the factors to consider should be mobility, rider experience (crowding), accessibility and land use densities. Other suggestions were to consider the other services available, such as Link and Sounder, and the wider economic value of transit, such as enabling trucks to get goods to and from the Port.

- **Impact of growth:** Members suggested monitoring the county's growth to track new markets and adjust service accordingly.

Service Allocation Discussion

Mr. Howell introduced the discussion on service allocation using a graphic (see last slide in the meeting presentation slides) of four horizontal axes and showing roughly where Metro's current system falls on each axis. These axes were:

New Markets	-----	Existing Markets
Productivity	-----	Coverage
Peak-Only	-----	All-day
Non-Transit Dependent Riders	-----	Transit Dependent Riders

These factors provide another way to see the values that guide system design. Each represents a trade-off. Mr. Howell asked task force members whether the current balance points are the right ones or what the members would change and why.

In the discussion, task force members had the following comments:

- **No change** – Several members would make no change in emphasis; the current balances capture our values given our limited resources.
- **On New Markets – Existing Markets**, several members would move more toward New Markets.
- **On Productivity – Coverage**, one member would move the emphasis to the center and three would move more toward Coverage.
- **On Peak-only – All Day**, two members would move the emphasis to the center and one would move further toward All-Day.
- **On Non-Transit Dependent Riders – Transit Dependent Riders**, several members would move more toward Transit Dependent.

Other comments included the following:

- **Partnerships:** A task force member pointed out that within geographic areas there are access issues to serve major job centers and businesses that operate 24/7. If Metro provided a spine with frequent service, there could be partnerships formed to serve spokes off the spine in local areas. There will not be enough funding for Metro to provide all the service needed.
- **Riders:** A task force member found overlap between new markets and transit dependent riders, since many people are moving to the far suburbs where housing prices are more affordable. Others commented that there are different definitions of transit-dependent riders and that they live throughout the county. Another said that a large percentage of low-income transit dependent riders are not getting the service they need. While they might not be a large portion of the population, they absolutely need service. It was suggested that Metro also do more to attract non-transit-dependent riders, such as providing Wi-Fi.
- **Impact on service:** A task force member found it hard to decide how to move the emphases without knowing how the changes would affect service.

- **New markets:** There was a suggestion that for jurisdictions that have made proactive decisions to create greater density in their land use patterns, and revise zoning and comprehensive plans, Metro could establish criteria on when those cities could expect to get transit service based on tracking new growth. New markets could invite service with signal priority and land use decisions. Another comment was that new markets are not necessarily outside urban centers; for example, South Lake Union is a new market that is not well served. Members noted that the new market vs. existing market choice is about long-term strategy, and that both existing and new markets are expanding rapidly.
- **Regional differences:** Several task force members suggested that the different parts of the county have such different needs that one set of choices on each axis was not enough.
- **Use of alternative services:** There was a suggestion to consider alternative services for both new markets and all-day service.
- **Missing elements:** Task force members commented that the trade-offs in the chart did not account for the connection between Metro's service decisions and the light rail system, or for the economic value of transit to get people to work, reduce congestion and to move goods for commerce.

Mr. Howell will summarize the ideas about potential changes to the Guidelines and service types from this discussion to help the task force in considering possible recommendations. He has taken note of task force members' interest in knowing how such changes would impact service.

Public Comment – There was no one who wanted to offer public comment.

Closing

The next task force meeting will be Wednesday, June 3 from 3:00 to 5:00 PM at Bellevue City Hall. Task force members will receive an email poll to help choose the date for a meeting in early July.

Chris O'Claire announced that Metro and Sound Transit will co-host open houses on their long-range plans. These are scheduled for June 16, 20 and 25.