

Metro Service Guidelines Task Force
Summary of Technical Workshops

August 13 and 17, 2015, 3:00 – 6:00 PM
Chinook Building, Seattle (Aug. 13); King Street Center, Seattle (Aug. 17)

Task Force members present on 8/13: Amy Biggs, Josh Brown, Tim Burgess, Fred Butler, John Chelminiak, Dorene Cornwell, Chris Eggen, George Frasier, Josh Kavanagh, Scott Kubly, Gordon McHenry, Lynn Moody, Tom Rasmussen, Carla Saulter, Jon Scholes; *Ex-Officio members:* Kevin Desmond; *Facilitator:* John Howell (Cedar River Group)

Task Force members present on 8/17: Vic Bishop, Suzette Cooke, Mahnaz Eshetu, Matt Larson, Shefali Ranganathan, Jim Stanton; *Ex-officio members:* Kevin Desmond, Mike Harbour; *Facilitator:* John Howell (Cedar River Group)

Members not present: Nancy Backus, Lauren Craig, Jim Ferrell, Hilary Franz, Patrick Green, Matt Koltnow, John Marchione, Edna Shim

Presenters: Jana Demas (Project Manager, Service Guidelines Task Force, King County Metro), Victor Obeso (Deputy General Manager, Planning and Customer Services, King County Metro), Chris O’Claire (Manager, Strategy & Performance, King County Metro)

Welcome and Meeting Objectives

John Howell welcomed task force members and explained the purpose of the workshop. The task force had prepared draft principles and recommendations for changes to the Service Guidelines and Metro’s planning process. Task force members were interested in understanding how their draft recommendations would impact service and in seeing some options for service types. The technical workshops were intended to show task force members the staff’s analysis of how the draft recommendations for the service guidelines could affect service investment and reduction decisions when applied. The purpose of the workshop is to share information rather than decision-making.

The workshop took place twice in order to accommodate summer schedules. The focus was on the impact of changes in three areas: (1) target service level; (2) service types; and (3) alternative services.

Target Service Level (Investment) Analysis

Jana Demas reminded the task force members of Metro’s four investment priorities and how Metro currently sets target service levels, and presented an analysis of how the draft task force principles and recommendations would change the targets (see presentation slides, “Target Service Level Analysis”).

The results of the target service level analysis were that an additional 148,100 hours of service would be needed after changes based on the task force’s draft recommendations, especially in the Off-Peak time period, and that the East historical subarea would have the largest percentage increase (4%) in service hours, and the West subarea would have the largest overall increase in the number of hours (71,250).

The analysis identified 37 corridors for increased investment (relative to the current methods), including 16 that are not currently on the target investment list. In terms of points for scoring each corridor, the changes would offer more gradation than the current Guidelines use. The current method allows corridors to receive 0 or 5 points for low-income and social equity, resulting in a total possible point score of 10 for social equity. The revised method would have the same 10 points for social equity (with gradation of both low-income and minority scores, with possible scores of 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 for each), and possible scores on geographic value of 2, 5, 7 or 10 points (the current method allows corridors to receive 0, 5, or 10 points). The average score on social equity currently is 5. With the proposed changes, the average score would be nearly the same—5.1. The average score on geographic value currently is 5, but would be 6.3 with proposed changes. Also, with the proposed changes (per the draft recommendations), the minimum service level in all corridors would be 60 minutes or better for fixed route service. Finally, the proposed changes included park-and-ride stalls at lots greater than 150 stalls in the analysis.

In response to questions, Ms. Demas provided the following information:

- **Investment priorities:** Social equity and geographic value are factors that help determine the target service level, which is the basis for Metro’s third priority for investment, after reducing overcrowding (first priority) and reliability (second priority). High productivity routes is the fourth priority. In the 2014 analysis there were 22,200 hours needed in Priority 1 (overcrowding) and 38,650 in Priority 2 (schedule reliability). With additional revenue from the improving economy and the City of Seattle investment voters approved in a levy, Metro is able to address these needs. Priority 3 has a remaining 484,200 hours of need, which would require a very large funding investment (although some of this Priority 3 investment need is addressed through the City of Seattle investment).
- **Need in dollars:** The additional 148,100 hours needed (based on the revised target service level analysis) would translate to approximately \$15 million annually if there were no need to purchase new buses.
- **Average scores:** The average score for geographic value was higher with the proposed changes than the average score on social equity, reflecting the increased value given to connecting activity centers throughout the county.
- **Changes in points:** Under the revised analysis, more corridors receive points for social equity but fewer receive the maximum points. The revised system would benefit corridors that have a below average score but include some low-income or minority populations. Under the current system, these corridors would get 0 points; under the revised system they could get 1 or 2 points. For geographic value, all corridors receive some points and many corridors increase their point score.
- **Social equity factors:** The analysis for social equity is based on boardings in low-income and minority census tracts. Minority census tracts are included based on County policy and on the federal rules under Title 6 to address underserved populations. Metro refreshes the analysis every year to keep up with demographic changes.
- **Effects of social equity analysis:** Some corridors that are close to the county average for minority and low income populations may fluctuate above or below the average in a given year.

In the current system a corridor would either get “0” or “5” points for each factor, depending on whether it was above or below the average for low-income and minority. The graduated scale reduces the impact on corridor scores from those potential year-to-year swings

- **New targeted corridors:** Of the 16 additional corridors the analysis identified, some score high enough in geographic value that they could be among the first to get funded as part of the target service level analysis. **Unserviced corridors:** Metro analyzed the current 112 corridors, as identified in the Strategic Plan. New corridors could be considered for alternative services. Also, the Long-Range Plan will look at potential new corridors.
- **Travel time and transfers:** Metro aims to connect activity centers. Metro’s two productivity measures do not assess travel time nor number of transfers, or relate travel time to social equity. However, for the Long-Range Plan, Metro is developing a tool to look at travel times to jobs, colleges and health care institutions, all of which are important to social equity.
- **Park and Ride lots:** Some task force members had suggested considering the effect of Park and Rides, so Metro added Park and Rides with 150 or more stalls to the scoring for the analysis (150 being the number of stalls needed to support a productive peak route). Metro estimates one stall equals 1.1 riders (based on regional carpool rates). There is an effect on some corridor scores and target service levels, but not a large effect overall. The staff did not look at situations where there is a string of leased Park and Ride lots in a corridor.
- **Purpose of analysis for the task force:** The question for the task force to consider is whether the suggested revisions would be a fairer way to choose investments.

Task force members offered the following comments:

- **Connections:** There are connections between social equity and geographic value. Social equity includes getting low-income and disabled people to jobs. The increase in scoring of geographic value for activity centers also helps social equity, since most jobs are in centers. Centers also often include medical services, another important need to serve social equity.
- **Disadvantage of increased gradation of points:** For social equity, in the new analysis, more corridors will get points in the middle of the range, which dilutes the effect of considering social equity for the neediest corridors. There could be some corridors with very transit dependent residents who would receive less service.

Mr. Howell noted that the task force, in addition to providing recommendations on the Service Guidelines, could also recommend actions for the Long-Range Plan, such as considering travel time and connections to reach workplaces.

Service Types Analysis

Chris O’Claire presented information on service types and four options staff tested in response to the task force’s draft recommendations. (See presentation slides, “Service Types Analysis”; and a handout illustrating each of four service type options.) Option 1 represented the current service types and served as a baseline.

In response to questions, Ms. O’Claire and other staff provided the following information:

- **Connection to priorities:** Metro considers service types in relation to the fourth priority, high-productivity routes, and looks at route productivity by service type on an annual basis. For example, when reductions are needed, Metro considers cuts in the bottom 25 percent of performance in each service type, rather than cutting the lowest of the system taken as a whole. In expansion, the proportion of each service type does not necessarily stay the same.
- **Reduction vs. investment scenarios:** The reason for looking at the service type options in the context of a reduction scenario is that in reductions Metro considers cuts based on performance within each service type. Investment scenarios would follow the investment priorities, and look first at overcrowding and reliability before considering target service levels and productivity. A potential change investment of 100,000 hours would focus mostly on these first two priorities.
- **Reduction circumstances:** Metro will look at cutting the bottom 25 percent of each service type's service only if the County Council has given the direction to reduce or when reprogramming routes that duplicate new Link light rail service. Over time the reductions will come more through shifting resources to higher productivity areas and alternative services rather than cutting routes.
- **Social equity impact:** For any service change considered, Metro analyzes the impact on historically disadvantaged populations, but has not done that analysis for the four service type options. Metro is federally required to complete a Title VI analysis on all service changes. Metro also takes into account the needs of social equity populations when planning service reductions or restructures, and also engages these populations in its public outreach process.
- **Performance measures:** Staff analyzed the four options using Metro's two performance measures: riders per platform hour and passenger miles per platform hour.
- **Real approach to a reduction scenario:** For each of the four options, staff made the reduction across all service types. However, in a real reduction scenario, Metro would look to replace poor-performing fixed routes with alternative services and explore where restructuring service made more sense than simply cutting service, as well as conduct a public outreach process.
- **Emphasis on peak service:** Two of the options (Options 2 and 3) divide service between peak and all-day, plus demand response, because peak-only routes meet specific niche markets. However, many all-day routes also serve peak period riders, and are included in the graph of the 100,000 hour reduction by time period.
- **Difference in reduction of peak between Options 2 and 3:** The difference in peak reduction of these two options is because Option 3 has a separate service type for Suburban/Rural Peak, so when cutting service from the bottom 25 percent of each service type, less peak service overall is reduced.
- **Option 4 connection to regional vision:** Option 4 provides a different way to understand and prioritize service, based on the areas served by the routes. For example, some Bellevue services in Option 4 are compared to Seattle services, since both are classified as Metropolitan Cities. The definitions are those the Puget Sound Regional Council uses for VISION 2040.
- **Issue for task force consideration:** Any of the four service type options would be workable and would meet industry standards. Each has pros and cons, as shown on the handout. The staff does not have a recommendation because the issue is one of values. It is are for the task force

to make a values recommendation, and for the County Council and County Executive to make decisions.

Task force members offered the following comments:

- **All-day service:** It is important to keep in mind that all-day service impacts social equity.
- **Subareas:** There was a request for a map of the historical subareas referred to in the analysis.
- **Deadhead trips:** There were concerns that deadhead trips to the bus bases unfairly reduce the productivity of routes not close to the bases.
- **Differences in the options:** A task force member expressed surprise in the differences the options show in the effects of a cut. Another commented that just the changing to “Urban, Suburban and Peak” as option types changes the emphasis to a regional system. Another commented that the options only make changes “around the edges” and do not address the fundamental issue of how to provide transit for the region since none of the options adds value for suburban communities.

Alternative Services Program Expansion

Victor Obeso presented potential changes to Metro’s Alternative Services Program. (See handouts, “Alternative Services Program: Potential Changes Based on Task Force Guidance”; “Case Study: Alternative Service Product Package for Mercer Island”; “Case Study: Alternative Service Product Package for Southeast King County” and “Alternative Services Product Matrix.”) He noted that in the 2015-16 budget, there is \$12 million set aside for alternative services. Thus far, these monies have been put towards projects in North Bend – Snoqualmie; the Snoqualmie Valley, Burien, Southeast King County, and Mercer Island; and Redmond. There is also alternative service on Vashon Island soon to be launched.

Mr. Howell reminded attendees that one of the task force’s draft recommendations is to significantly expand alternative services where fixed route services are not warranted. Also, the important role of community partnerships means that alternative services offer a way to identify where new service could go in the transit network.

In response to questions, Mr. Obeso and other staff provided the following information:

- **Prioritizing:** When funding is available, Metro’s priorities for alternative services are: (1) to address areas impacted by prior budget cuts; (2) to right-size service; and (3) to complement fixed route services. Metro would also develop criteria to prioritize areas of the county.
- **Current areas targeted:** The areas where there are current or planned alternative services were identified three years ago and a plan approved by the County Council.
- **Cost:** Alternative services have been lower in cost than fixed route services. For the three current projects (North Bend – Snoqualmie, Burien and Mercer Island) the annual operating cost is roughly \$1 million.
- **Comparison of Mercer Island alternative and fixed route service:** The new shuttle service captures about 70 percent of the two routes serving Mercer Island that were cut. Some services will be addressed with a community van that has not begun service yet.

- **TripPool service:** There will be a TripPool Pilot Program on Mercer Island to serve the crowded Park and Ride. TripPools have a volunteer driver who is screened. Riders register using an app. There is no charge to ride for those with an ORCA pass; otherwise the trip will have a one-zone fare.

Task force members offered the following comments:

- **Allocation criteria:** It is helpful to see the checklist of criteria for creating alternative services. The criteria should make clearer that alternative services are also a strategy to help meet social equity and geographic value needs.
- **Cost comparison:** It would be helpful and more compelling to have a cost comparison for the alternative services that have replaced fixed route services, and a comparison of the services. Alternative services should be lower cost than the fixed route services they replace.
- **Limitation for low-income riders:** Low-income riders and others who do not have a smart phone would not be able to use alternative services such as a TripPool.
- **Need quantifiable criteria:** There should be criteria that quantify the demand for alternative services, such as the number of riders to be served.
- **Outreach:** There needs to be targeted outreach to build partnerships with local jurisdictions.
- **Importance of partnerships:** Partnerships offer a way to “grow the pie” of funding to support transit services. Many companies/employers would pay for alternative service if they knew the cost and benefits to them, even though the service would be open to the general public. Metro should approach companies that have their own transportation services, as well. The alternative services also could help to seed new markets.
- **Partner agreements:** It would be useful to know who the partners are so far and how much/what they have contributed. It would be good to have some expectations for partners, and to communicate to those interested the different ways partnerships can work.
- **Partnerships with less resourced communities:** Communities that would like alternative services do not necessarily have funds to contribute or large employers to involve. There needs to be flexibility to work with communities to find ways to meet their needs. Metro could partner with a community to identify other possible partners, such as a group of smaller employers.

Wrap-Up Discussion

Task force members offered the following comments about the information presented:

- **Alternative services:**
 - These services provide a good benefit for a relatively modest cost.
 - The framework presented is a good one, but ultimately it is up to the Council and Executive to determine the appropriate cost.
 - These services can be a way to increase ridership on fixed routes, such as through the connection to the Issaquah Park and Ride.
 - It is not clear why there would be alternative service from Mercer Island to Seattle that duplicates fixed route service.
 - Engaging communities to identify the service they want is an excellent approach.

- **Service type options:**
 - Good analysis.
 - Struggling with how to build consensus and what we need to know.
 - There is no right answer—all the options work. The answer is to protect the transit service we have.
 - The options are confusing because the conclusions depend on how details that are not shown are defined.
 - Do the reductions shown have an impact on any disadvantaged populations?
 - The emphasis on peak in Options 2 and 3 might devalue all-day service, which affects social equity.
- **Target Service Level**
 - Generally the approach is good. Destination data need to be incorporated into the analysis.
 - The results seem to diminish the scoring on social equity and are more focused on geographic value.
- **Productivity:**
 - It is unfair that communities farther from the bus bases are penalized by Metro's performance measures.

Task force members thanked the staff for their extensive work in identifying how the task force's emerging recommendations might affect service.

Mr. Howell summarized the discussion as task force members generally liking the alternative service framework with the exception of making sure that there is no impact on social equity, and that for the target service levels there was a suggestion that social equity and geographic value need to be more in balance with each other. There was not a consensus on service types.

Before the next full task force meeting, Mr. Howell will have further conversations with some members individually and possibly in small groups about how they view the service type options and analysis. He invited members to email their thoughts. He hopes to be able to bring a consensus summary to the September meeting based on these conversations.

The next full task force meetings will be on September 17 at the Mercer Island Community Center, and October 7 at the Chinook Building in Seattle.