



## King County

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**To:** Members of the Joint Transportation Committee Transit Advisory Panel

**From:** Kevin Desmond, General Manager, Metro Transit Division

**Subject** Representative Liias' Questions Regarding Transit Partnerships and Service

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information about King County Metro Transit in response to the three questions posed by Representative Liias. We look forward to sharing this information at the next Joint Transportation Committee Transit Advisory Panel meeting on September 29, 2010, and will be happy to answer any questions or provide additional information as requested.

### **King County Metro Transit**

King County Metro Transit is the largest public transportation agency in Washington State, providing half the service hours and serving more than half the transit riders in Washington State. Metro operates a fleet of approximately 1,400 vehicles to serve 1.8 million residents in King County across a 2,134 square mile area. Our fleet includes standard and articulated clean diesel coaches, electric trolleybuses, and hybrid diesel-electric buses. Annual ridership for 2009 was approximately 112 million. Metro serves riders who are disabled or who have special needs with accessible fixed route service - all Metro buses have wheelchair lifts or ramps and all routes and trips are accessible - as well as paratransit van service and a taxi script program.

Metro also operates the largest publicly-owned vanpool program in the country. On an average weekday, about 1,100 vans carry approximately 6,100 people, eliminating approximately 5,000 vehicle trips a day. Metro also supports the regional Ridematch program which helps commuters form and sustain new vanpools and carpools in seven counties by matching names in a computer data base. We also provide extensive commute trip reduction services to 480 major employers and sell approximately 485,000 transit and commuter-van passes per year to more than 2,000 employers and institutions. Metro is also the contract operator of Sound Transit Express commuter bus service, Link light rail and the City of Seattle's South Lake Union Streetcar.

## **1. Coordination with Others**

In delivering our services, Metro works closely with other transit and transportation agencies, jurisdictions and organizations to ensure efficient, integrated travel options throughout the region. This coordination occurs on multiple levels, ranging from governing boards to management groups to staff and project teams. The King County Council, the Regional Transit Committee and the Sound Transit Board are examples of decision-making bodies of elected officials and high level staff. Management-level coordination occurs through groups such as the Transit Integration Group (TIG), which brings together representatives from the eight Puget Sound transit agencies to discuss service delivery, operations, construction and long range planning issues. The Transit Operators' Committee, staffed by the Puget Sound Regional Council includes transit agencies, Washington State Ferries, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the City of Seattle. Interagency teams and planning processes allow for project level coordination.

Some of the accomplishments from regional coordination include:

- **Fare Integration.** Metro and other transit agencies in the Central Puget Sound region have implemented a common fare system, "One Regional Card for All" (ORCA), to cover the region's transit agencies and state ferries. No other region in the United States has attempted such a comprehensive, multi-agency fare integration program. Fare coordination began with agency efforts to coordinate fare payment in the 1980's, as the number of inter-county transit commuters grew, leading to the development of the Puget Pass in 1999. Metro will continue to work with the other agencies in moving toward further fare simplification and regional fare alignment.
- **Service Integration.** Metro works closely with other transit agencies to coordinate on day to day service planning, major service changes, and regional corridor projects and plans. For example, Metro has worked closely with Sound Transit over the past 10 years to maximize the success of the overall system and best serve the needs of commuters as the two agencies integrate service in King County. For instance, when Sound Transit initiated its all day express service on SR 522, Metro was able to discontinue duplicative services and reinvest hours in additional peak services and new services to reach new markets. With the advent of light rail, Metro worked with Sound Transit to develop a service integration plan to restructure Metro's bus system in Southeast Seattle and Southwest King County to reduce duplication, better serve light rail stations and allow customers to connect easily between bus and light rail. Metro continues to work with Sound Transit to ensure continued efficient connections to services such as Sounder Commuter Rail and future light rail lines.
- **Capital Facility Planning and Use.** Many of the capital facilities Metro uses are the result of partnerships with agencies such as WSDOT and Sound Transit. For example, Metro and Sound Transit have a "good neighbor" agreement that allows shared use of transit facilities, regardless of ownership. Metro, Sound Transit and WSDOT also establish maintenance and operations agreements for many of the park-and-ride lots in King County. Metro also works closely with local jurisdictions on projects to help buses travel faster and more reliably such as signal synchronization, transit signal priority and business-access and transit (BAT) lanes. These types of projects are critical to ongoing operations and the success of Metro's new Rapid Ride service.

- **Major Projects.** Metro collaborates with transportation agencies and jurisdictions to keep the region moving during major projects such as improvements to I-5, I-405, SR 520 and SR 99. For both mitigation of construction impacts and long-term highway capacity, Metro provides transit and other mobility services as options to driving alone. Metro is also working closely with the City of Seattle on the First Hill Streetcar project to ensure integration of the two systems.
- **Regional Trip Planning and Ridematching.** Metro has worked with other agencies in the region to develop tools that make it easier to ride the bus or find a carpool or vanpool. The regional online Trip Planner for example provides information about scheduled transit service in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties and can develop a personalized trip itinerary for travel anywhere in the three-county area. Metro also helped to establish the regional ridematch system, RideshareOnline.com which is managed by WSDOT to help commuters form and sustain new carpools and vanpools in seven counties by matching names in a computer data base.

### **Working with Community Organizations and Private Companies**

Metro also partners with other organizations and private companies in delivery of community services.

Examples of these partnerships include:

- **Accessible Services.** To supplement accessible fixed-route services, Metro provides contracted Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit van service. Metro contracts First Transit to operate the Access Control Center and Solid Ground and Veolia to hire the drivers and maintain and operate the vehicles. Through its Community Access Transportation (CAT) program, Metro partners with local non-profit organizations on community transportation services by providing vans, maintenance and some operating funds. The average cost per ride on CAT service is about one-ninth the cost of Access service. Metro also subsidizes the Taxi Scrip Program, which pays 50 percent of the cost of a taxi ride for low income customers who are seniors or adults with a disability.
- **Commuter and School Groups.** Employers and schools can contract with King County Metro for customized express bus routes. Fares are set to cover 100% of the operating costs and riders pay for the service with a monthly pass or daily cash fare. Metro also works with school districts to respond to student transportation needs. Strategies can include selling fare media to schools and making minor adjustments to routing or schedules to better serve school populations.
- **Coordination with private providers of transportation.** Metro has also worked closely with several large employers in their development of privately operated shuttles/circulators for their employees and customers. Metro's staff assisted both Microsoft and Seattle Children's Hospital in identifying stop locations, routing and schedules for their transportation services. This included analyzing how the private routes could be integrated with existing Metro and Sound Transit service. Metro staff also assisted private operators with the resolution of operational issues related to services using public facilities.

## **2. Coordination with Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)**

King County Metro works closely with multiple groups within WSDOT. Metro collaborates on WSDOT's major corridor projects, as mentioned previously, and partners with WSDOT on funding and grant efforts.

### **Major Corridor Projects**

Public transportation is a strong component in ensuring mobility in the Puget Sound region. The region is looking to public transportation systems such as Metro to a) mitigate congestion caused by multi-year construction projects, and b) reduce the need for additional highway lanes.

- **Construction Mitigation Program.** Metro has an important role in the major corridor projects that are currently being planned and implemented. Foremost, Metro is partnering with WSDOT to provide mitigation during the multi-year improvements on I-405 and to provide the Moving Forward projects on the Alaska Way Viaduct and will be doing the same on SR 520. The state is providing the funding for numerous programs that increase the number of people vanpooling, carpooling, riding the bus and altering their work schedules, to help manage traffic in these corridors.
- **Tolling in the Region.** WSDOT is planning to implement an electronic tolling system on SR 520 in spring 2011. Tolling the SR 520 corridor is expected to have travel-time benefits for both transit and general purpose traffic and result in less congestion in the corridor. In conjunction with tolling, Metro is expecting to provide increased transit service as part of the Urban Partnership program. Enhanced transit will provide a viable alternative to driving, giving all residents, including low-income groups, more opportunities to use fast and frequent transit service for cross-lake travel. Metro is also participating in the Eastside Corridor Tolling Study and is working with Community Transit and Sound Transit to identify principles important to transit operation as High-Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes are designed.
- **Project Review.** Metro and King County also provide project review in order to ensure that regional projects include consideration for transit operation and passenger facilities. For example, Metro has been active in the planning process for the SR 520 and SR 99 corridors.

### **Funding and Programs**

- **Grants and Formula Funds.** Regional Mobility grants fund local government projects such as park and ride lots, peak hour transit service and projects that improve connectivity. Through the use of one of these grants, Metro expanded the Brickyard Park and Ride in east King County, improving access for users and providing additional stalls at this busy facility. In fall 2009, Metro also received a regional mobility grant to improve Route 245 service between Kirkland, Overlake and Eastgate/Factoria, investing peak-period frequencies improvements in this corridor.
- **Commute Trip Reduction.** Metro also works closely with the state and other employers to implement the state's Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) Program. Through the CTR program, including the newly designated Growth and Transportation Efficiency Centers (GTECs), Metro partners with employers to support employer-based programs

encouraging the use of alternatives to driving alone such as riding the bus or train, carpooling, vanpooling, bicycling, walking, working a compressed work week, or teleworking. There are approximately 550 worksites in King County affected by the CTR law, representing over 300,000 employees. Most of the jurisdictions in King County contract with Metro for all or a portion of their CTR program.

- **Vanpool Program.** Metro administers the largest publicly owned and operated vanpool and vanshare program in the nation for commuters who live and or work in King County. In 2009, our VanPool/VanShare program had 1,088 commuter vans in operation at year's end. Working with WSDOT, Metro received \$3,203,200 in Vanpool Investment Program grant funds authorized by the legislature for the purchase of 10 expansion, and 144 replacement vans in 2011. Metro is also working collaboratively with Washington transit vanpool operators on a state-level effort to develop a 2020 Plan to increase vanpooling across the state.
- **Ridematch.** Metro is working with WSDOT to provide replacement software for the ridematching program, RideshareOnline.com. The selected ridematch software, iCarpool.com, will provide improved and expanded matching capability and commute program management tools for employers.

### **3. Service Delivery Decisions**

Metro provides an array of services to meet the many different travel needs of passengers and support the varying land uses throughout King County. It can be a difficult process to balance the range of needs. Metro's service delivery decisions are governed by many factors including our planning documents such as the Strategic and Comprehensive plans, council direction, county code, voter initiatives, public input and available resources. Within that framework, Metro considers a number of factors when designing a transit network that seek to balance the different purposes of the network while making it as efficient as possible for the greatest number of riders. Metro is also committed through policy and King County code to conduct a community planning process as part of the design and implementation of significant changes to existing service or development of new service.

Service delivery decisions are particularly challenging at this point in time as Metro is facing an unprecedented financial crisis. With declining sales tax revenue, Metro will need to address significant challenges in determining the future of the system. To help Metro address these challenges, a Regional Transit Task Force has been convened to consider a policy framework to guide the growth, and if necessary, the contraction of Metro's system. The recommendations from the Task Force are expected to be developed by the end of October 2010.