King County Metro

King County Transit Advisory Commission
July 16, 2019
6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
201 S. Jackson St.
General Manager's Conference Room

6 p.m.   Welcome, consent agenda, announcements

6:05 p.m.   Chairperson report

6:20 p.m.   Introduce new Community Relations staff,

6:30 p.m.   Real-time customer information [TAC action: give feedback]

                Matt Hansen (Customer Communications and Services) is leading work at Metro to
                improve how Metro delivers real-time information about cancellations/delays to
                customers. He's looking for feedback from the TAC about what is and isn't working
                about real-time information and guidance on future improvements.

7:30 p.m.   TAC recruitment [TAC action: give feedback]

                TAC needs to fill positions in Council district 2 (East of I-5, includes UW, Capitol Hill, SE
                Seattle, Rainier Valley, down to Renton), district 7 (Federal Way) and district 4
                (Ballard/Magnolia/Queen Anne)

7:45 p.m.   Adjourn

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Commission members in attendance: Cheryl Harrison, Aaron Morrow, David Johnson, Min Cho, Lin Robinson, Pete Rubin, Gale Shinozaki, Judy Daufney-Stenberg and Lei Wu

King County staff: DeAnna Martin (Partnerships and Engagement Manager), Brian Camozzi (King County Deputy Ombuds for Transit), Gunner Scott (Community Relations), Cindy Chen (Community Relations)

Chair Aaron Morrow opened the meeting. Several announcements were made by staff:

- North Eastside Mobility Project service change package passed full County Council on July 10.
- Recruitment for the Mobility Board for the North Link Connections project closes at the end of July.
  - o Cindy sent out the application to the group after the meeting in case others wanted to apply.

The chair gave an update regarding the Access Task Force and its transition to becoming an official county commission where it will be called the Access Paratransit Advisory Committee. The group is formalizing their working rules in July through a small subgroup. They are also working to solidify what needs to happen in order to launch the new commission in January. New members should be seated by Aug. 31, 2019.

The chair also asked if anyone would like to serve as the next vice chair. Lin will become the next chair starting in August or September.

Gunner Scott, a new addition to the Community Relations team in the Strategic Communications and Engagement team at Metro, introduced himself and his portfolio to the group.

Matt Hansen (Customer Communications and Services) is leading work at Metro to improve how Metro delivers real-time information about cancellations/delays to customers. He was looking for feedback from the TAC about what is and is not working about real-time information and guidance on future improvements. Matt would like to come back to talk about ORCA Next Generation.

Real-time information refers to how unplanned or planned cancellations/disruptions affect service, and how it is communicated to the public. Matt clarified that the real-time information that he is talking about here is distinct from real-time sign language or text, which is used for deaf, deaf-blind communities. He started the conversation by asking what the group's experience has been so far with real-time information.

Members commented on their experiences:

- Real-time information is critical for the deaf-blind community. There's no good communication or signage accessible to a deaf-blind person. People need to know what stop they are being let off at, and especially if there is an emergency. If the driver announced something over the intercom, the deaf-blind person would still have no way of knowing what happened.
- If it isn't a major event, there isn't enough integration with One Bus Away to let people know whether a bus is coming or not. There wasn't enough communication with the public during the snow event this winter either about real-time status of the buses.
- Information should be disseminated through apps like Google Maps and One Bus Away. Google Maps is used by some teenagers.
- Technology changes quickly; how are Google and other tech companies getting and using Metro's data?
  - Third party apps like One Bus Away pull data from Metro.
- Dynamic signage would be great.
- There isn't much information directly at the stop. In case of darkness or rain, you may want more information at the stop itself – the stop numbers are hard to read and not everyone may have a phone to look up information.
- What does it mean when buses are going to the base?
  - If the bus is scheduled to go back to the base but drives by a stop where are people waiting, they are supposed to stop and pick them up.
- Is there a good way to let people know when buses are full and passing stops? Bus stop signs usually just say the bus number and route but not much else.
  - A: There are two ways to address crowding. Automatic passenger counters (APC) are installed on about half of the buses. Newer buses will have APCs. Once we have more APCs on the fleet, we will have a meaningful data stream and find a way to show that information. The second way is that some transit apps crowdsource information about how crowded the buses are, similar to Waze. The Transit app is one of them.

Many TAC members were not aware of Metro's existing real-time information tools including:

- One member's daughter has a disability and takes a route the same time every day. She can receive texts.
  - **A**: She should sign up for transit alerts (which can be received via text) and to subscribe for Next Departure so that she can text to ask when her next bus will arrive.
- Buses run early sometimes; drivers should not leave early if their stop is a critical link or a major stop.
  - **A**: Agreed that this is a problem.

Matt explained that the goal of this project is to streamline data so that folks can hear about the cancellation or disruption beforehand. Currently, data is gathered from many different sources, cleaned and pushed out to different channels manually. While Metro has many tools to share real-time information including transit alerts (email/text), Next Departure and social media, poor user interface and a lack of awareness of these tools are problematic.

TAC members commented:

- Additional education is needed to let people know about these tools and how to ride the bus; this will help increase ridership and Metro's reputation.
- Temporary stop closures are challenging for people with visual impairments. There are different protocols for how Metro communicates long-term and short-term closures (often physical signage). Metro needs to improve by using a RSS feed to share that information with people or their apps, so that all riders have a way to access that information.
- Metro should also use an Interactive Voice Response system (IVR) which is through a phone, and can be really robust to share information. Not everyone wants to or can use an app.
- Some members didn't know you can get alerts via text or email for Metro routes. They recommended this information be posted at every stop and on every bus. One Bus Away and other apps often have different information.
- There isn't reliable communication between the ferry and the bus drivers on Vashon. There is not a consistent policy where drivers know they need to wait for the ferry; sometimes the member calls customer service and asks them to hold the bus.

Matt explained the scope of the project. The goal is to clean up the upstream data sources and dissemination system of the data. Metro will then be able to populate its own real-time tools (like social media and transit alerts) and push it out to third party systems like One Bus Away. Phase 1 of the project will improve the quality of the data upstream by pinging buses every 30 seconds to get their GPS signal, rather than every 90 seconds as they do today. The first phase will also improve the organization of the data (stop closures, reroutes), and make it easier to have one tool or action that can send out that piece of information. Currently, staff have to do several different actions to send out one piece of information – this would create one tool to distribute one piece of information through many different tools.

In phase 2, the project will improve tools for field supervisor to report information back better, make it easier to redo alert and reroute language, and improve the use of Salesforce. Community Transit uses the same system, and the consultant has done the same project in Boston. Matt expects customers will see improvements in the information after this project.

TAC members had several more questions about the scope of the project and end results:

- Will there be capability for multiple languages, and will it be accessible for other devices/services and formats?
  - **A**: Will hope to do those later. Most of our service information (static information about schedules, etc.) is in English and Spanish, but there's a significant need to communicate with them in different languages for real-time information.
- Will there be a pilot? Recommend working with the deaf-blind community; what works for them is different than people who are blind with hearing. Deaf-blind individuals need braille and visual information that conveys information.
  - **A**: Yes, we will work with you on user testing with the deaf-blind community.

- This assumes that when the data upstream is good, the distribution of that information will be automated.
  - **A**: Yes, moving towards more automation.
- David: Do you work with the app developers based on whatever standard you use? I recommend working with them in advance so they have lead time; this will increase their chance of success.
  - **A**: Yes, we work with One Bus Away.
  General Transit Feed Specification is an international standard by which transit agencies publish their data in a format that is usable by a variety of software applications. Metro uses GTFS.

Cindy led the group in a discussion around TAC recruitment for new members. The group generated a list of organizations and ways to get the word out about recruiting including:

- Council staff
- Mobility Coalition
- Library newsletters
- Housing authorities
- Employers and unions
- Customer complaints
- Rainier Valley Corps

Aaron led a discussion around how to raise the profile of the TAC. Members also discussed how to get involved with their local jurisdictions to advocate for transit. Some methods suggested were to meet with local councilmembers, attend meetings or events with community relations or get involved in cities or areas where decisions are being made that impact transit.

Possible methods included:

- Use the Metro Matters blog to give the TAC a voice through Metro's channels
  - Three people agreed to be in a subgroup to work on this: Aaron, Cheryl and David
  - **Subgroup to work on this will be Aaron, David and Cheryl – convene them once in July to talk about this – did not meet in July; reschedule for August-September.**
- TAC members who live on the Eastside will meet up between the July and August meeting to figure out an agenda for talking with County Councilmembers.
  - Judy and Aaron met in July to discuss and decided on action steps.

The meeting adjourned shortly after 7:45 p.m.

Action items:

- Send blurb about TAC recruitment to TAC to distribute to their networks (Cindy)
- Find out about local transit and transportation planning efforts that TAC can be involved in (Cindy)
- Eastside members meet and discuss what issues to advocate for on the Eastside

- ☐ Subgroup to meet to talk about raising TAC's profile through the blog or other methods (David, Aaron, Cheryl)
- ☐ Question for Matt: What's the policy around last ride/trip if it is cancelled? Especially if rider has a disability (Cindy tracking down answer)