



King County

Policy Paper: Mobility

IN BRIEF

- ❖ Mobility is the number one concern for the people of King County, and King County is committed to supporting the creation of an interconnected transportation system that gives more people more choices to get to more places on time.
- ❖ The 2017-2018 Proposed Budget lays the foundation to achieve the long-term vision for mobility in our region.
 - The 2017-2018 budget begins to build the organization and infrastructure to deliver on METRO CONNECTS, Metro Transit's long-term vision, while also delivering more for customers today. More than 300,000 hours of new service will be added over the next two years to address over-crowding and reliability, as well as to invest in corridors that do not meet target service levels under current guidelines. In addition, the 2017-2018 Proposed Budget makes the capital and organizational investments necessary to achieve the long-term transit vision for our region.
 - The sustainable funding provided in the proposed budget will allow the King County Marine Division to continue to provide the Water Taxi, an important transportation option to West Seattle and Vashon Island that also alleviates traffic congestion in the downtown Seattle waterfront.
 - While resource limitations mean that the 2017-2018 budget for Roads focuses on life safety and addressing only the highest priority maintenance and preservation needs, the Road Services Division will continue to look for efficiencies in service provision and support a legislative agenda for sustainable and sufficient funding.
- ❖ Achieving the King County vision for regional mobility requires investments in Metro Transit's organizational and infrastructure capital to create a foundation to support efficient and effective system growth in the future, investment in maintaining the transportation option provided by the Marine Division, and work with state, county, and city leaders to identify and lobby for a solution to the Roads funding challenge.

OVERVIEW

Mobility is the number one concern of people in King County. Congestion on the roadways creates a major challenge for commuters, negatively impacts the environment, and is a threat to the economic vitality of King County.

The Central Puget Sound region is growing faster than any other large metropolitan area in the United States. With over one million more people and 850,000 new jobs expected in this region over the next 25 years, public transportation will play an increasingly critical role in improving mobility, protecting our environment, and growing the regional economy.

Demand for public transportation is at an all-time high, and King County is committed to supporting the creation of an interconnected transportation system that gives more people more choices to get to more places on time.

- ❖ King County Metro Transit provides over 120 million trips a year and takes 175,000 cars off the road each weekday, carrying nearly half of downtown Seattle's workforce to and from their jobs. Investments in the 2017-2018 Proposed Budget increase service to customers, create a better environment/experience for transit customers and employees, and build the infrastructure for sustained growth of one of the nation's largest and fastest growing transit systems.
- ❖ The Water Taxi provides more than half a million trips per year (and growing) and delivers superior on-time performance and reliability. The 2017-2018 Proposed Budget reaffirms the commitment to the King County Water Taxi.
- ❖ King County roads carry one million vehicles per day, half of them from places outside the unincorporated area. The County does not have the revenue to adequately maintain the roads in the unincorporated areas. Advocating for legislative reform of Roads funding as proposed by the Bridges and Roads Task Force is a key priority in the next biennium.

Major 2017-2018 budget investments are discussed in the following pages.

TAKING ACTION ON METRO TRANSIT

The 2017-2018 Proposed Budget lays the foundation to achieve the future transit system envisioned in METRO CONNECTS, Metro Transit's long-range plan for bringing the region more service, more choices, and one easy-to-use transit system over the next 25 years.

A RECORD OF INNOVATION

Decades of innovation at Metro Transit provide a strong foundation on which to build:

- ❖ The highly successful RapidRide lines, with ridership already 66 percent over projections. Increasing this system is critical to the METRO CONNECTS program with 13 more lines identified by 2025.
- ❖ One of the greenest bus fleets in the United States as 100 percent of the fleet will be hybrid, electric, or battery powered by the end of 2018.
- ❖ Programs such as promoting non-motorized travel by providing bike racks on buses and outreach to new riders.
- ❖ The ORCA card system that has made fare payment more efficient and convenient and continues to receive high satisfaction ratings from customers. During the biennium, the region will be developing the next generation ORCA system, which will provide more benefits to customers.
- ❖ The innovative ORCA LIFT program that provides reduced fares to lower-income individuals.
- ❖ Regional partnerships such as the most recent Metro-Sound Transit integration efforts. The successful launch of U-LINK service in March of this year, which connected more neighborhoods to high-capacity transit at the new Link stations at Capitol Hill and the University of Washington, shows how bus service can integrate with light rail to create an interconnected system.

INVESTING IN THE MOBILITY OF THE REGION

The last major expansion of transit facilities took place in the early 1990s, when the downtown bus tunnel and North Operating Base were opened. King County's economy has recovered from the Great Recession – unemployment hovers around five percent and sales taxes finally have exceeded pre-recession levels. The forecasts for the region assume significant population and job growth in the coming years.

The 2017-2018 Proposed Budget positions Metro Transit to successfully implement the expansion of the transit system that will be needed over the next 25 years.

In August 2016, Metro Transit launched **METRO CONNECTS**, its long-range plan for a world-class transit system that gives customers more frequent, reliable, and effective service all day, every day. The METRO CONNECTS vision for 2040 calls for Metro Transit to:

- ❖ Double ridership
- ❖ Increase bus service by 70 percent
- ❖ Fully integrate our region's light rail and bus systems

The 2017-2018 Proposed Budget for Metro Transit calls for major initiatives that balance delivering today's system with investing in the future system. The 2017-2018 budget begins to build the organization and infrastructure to deliver on the METRO CONNECTS vision, while also delivering more for customers today. More than 300,000 hours of new service will be added over the next two years to address over-crowding and reliability, as well as to invest in corridors that do not meet the target service levels under current guidelines. In addition, the 2017-2018 Proposed Budget makes the capital and organizational investments necessary to achieve the long-term transit vision for the region. Once these long-term investments are in place, additional service-hour investments will be made to further enhance the system.



INVESTING TO IMPROVE RIDERS' EXPERIENCE

The 2017-2018 Proposed Budget:

- ❖ **Improves transit service by adding over 300,000 hours of bus service over the next two years** to relieve overcrowding on 27 routes, improve reliability on 60 routes, and help bring about 20 routes closer to their target service levels. These service investments will address overcrowding and reliability, ensure service continuity during and after the completion of major construction activity in Seattle, and add targeted service to routes and corridors using Metro Transit's service guidelines.
- ❖ **Invests in the public's and Metro Transit worker's experience of the transportation system**, funding improvements in Metro Transit customer and operator safety, as well as enhancements to customer information and fare payment systems. Investments will provide schedule relief for operator recovery time, add Metro Transit Police staff to ensure safety continues to be Metro's No. 1 priority, and equip all Metro buses with cameras by the end of 2018.

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR SYSTEM EXPANSION

Evolving from a system that for decades has incrementally added service and facilities (such as RapidRide) to a productive and highly integrated service network requires a foundation of planning, mobilization, acquisition, and construction – activities that are not readily visible to the public.

Metro Transit will deploy a similar strategy to Amazon.com during the recession in 2001. Rather than focusing on short-term profits, Amazon management opted for a long-term approach that devoted time and money to expanding its back-end programming with large data servers, building up its web interface, and building new warehouses to speed delivery of physical goods to customers. While initially unprofitable, these investments positioned Amazon to emerge from the dot.com and Great Recessions as the highest-performing online sales platform in the world, delivering the best online shopping experience anywhere, and burnishing the corporate brand. By forgoing short-term profits for long-term

gains, Amazon's investments in infrastructure and technology provided the capability to meet ever increasing customer demand.

This is the challenge and opportunity now before Metro Transit. The 2017-2018 Proposed Budget lays the foundation for long-term expansion to meet the future mobility needs of the region.

- ❖ **Strengthen the foundation of Metro Transit's system** by investing in operational infrastructure, including investing in speed and reliability projects, planning for future RapidRide lines, planning for future improvements to and expansion of transit passenger facilities, expanding the capacity of bases, and improving access to transit through investments in non-motorized pathways and park and ride capacity.
- ❖ **Enhance organizational capacity** to hire and train operators, vehicle maintenance crews, and supervisors to ensure there is no compromise to the safe and efficient operation of the overall system with added service. Metro Transit is already challenged to hire enough operators to meet the needs of its existing schedule. The budget provides some resources to address the difficulty in the regional job market in finding qualified candidates. The budget also invests in project managers and other support staff to plan and implement the infrastructure investments described in the preceding paragraph.

TAKING ACTION ON THE ROADS NETWORK

King County's 1,500-mile road system is an important asset of the County's built infrastructure. Unfortunately, nearly three decades of annexations, declines in gas tax revenues, and the effects of voter initiatives have led to the chronic underfunding of the local bridge and road system, particularly county roads outside of cities. Current funding for King County roads and bridges is only sufficient to address critical life safety issues and a minor amount of work to preserve some of the existing infrastructure. Improvements necessary to address capacity and mobility issues are currently unfunded.

To manage the existing infrastructure at its optimal life cycle and address certain mobility and capacity needs would require an estimated additional \$400 million dollars annually. King County receives about \$100 million annually in revenue for the care of county bridges and roads. Without additional resources, it is estimated that aging and associated degradation of assets could result in the closure of about 35 bridges as they become unsafe, and approximately 72 miles of failing roadways could be restricted or closed. About 65 percent of the stormwater system is at risk of failure, and more slides and flooding from clogged and aging drainage structures are expected.

The Road Services Division (Roads) is working to innovate to improve efficiency, but no amount of local government innovation can fix antiquated state funding formulas. In nine of the 10 largest Washington counties (excluding King County), an average of 45 percent of people live in the unincorporated area and pay into their county Road funds.¹ In King County, only 12 percent of residents pay for the roads that one-million cars drive on every day. Even more dramatically, just 3.2 percent of King County's taxable sales take place in the unincorporated area, versus a 22 percent average in the other eight counties, which illustrates that there is little tax base in King County's unincorporated area. King County is the only county to have fully implemented the state Growth Management Act, which calls for urban areas to be annexed into cities. The old system for funding county general services and county roads didn't contemplate growth management, and it no longer works today.

Key Highlights of Bridges and Roads Task Force Recommendations

- ❖ A new county-wide revenue tool is needed that is tied to inflation, sustainable, long-term, provides a benefit to cities and the county, and is not regressive.
- ❖ The County should expand outreach to all stakeholders to increase awareness of the problems Roads faces.
- ❖ Incorporate county roads that are orphaned, islands of roads within a city or cities, and Potential Annexation Areas within the growth boundaries of cities into those jurisdictions. This may require additional authority from the state legislature and support for recipient cities.

Last fall the Executive empaneled regional leaders and community members in a **Bridges and Roads Task Force** to examine the Road Services funding gap and the efficiencies put in place to address the serious funding shortfall. The task force recommendations are highlighted in the adjacent box. The Task Force recognized that the most successful approach to closing the Roads funding gap may require multiple revenue tools and efficiencies, with some additional resources dedicated to the transportation needs of cities. Corrective action by the Washington State Legislature is needed, and the Executive is committed to leading the effort to find a solution.

TAKING ACTION ON THE MARINE TRANSIT SYSTEM

The Marine Division's King County Water Taxi provides high quality and efficient service that moves people safely and quickly, improves quality of life, and enhances the region's economic competitiveness.

The Water Taxi provides safe, reliable transportation to over 500,000 riders annually on its two routes from West Seattle and Vashon Island to Downtown Seattle. The Water Taxi has experienced a 10 percent ridership increase in 2015 and is trending toward even higher passenger growth in 2016.

Every year the Council must renew the property tax levy for funding operations of the Water Taxi. The Water Taxi has not had a sustainable source of funding since 2009, when the Council reduced the levy for marine operations in order to meet the needs for Metro Transit bus service, whose sales tax revenue

¹ From OFM April 2016 population [projections](#) for 2016
September 26, 2016

fell off during the Great Recession. Since that time, the Marine Division has carefully managed its funds and service to Vashon Island and West Seattle by drawing upon its reserves. Those reserves are now exhausted.

The 2017-2018 budget proposes a sustainable funding level for the Water Tax of 1.25 cents per thousand of assessed property value that allows for the continuation of services.

The Marine Division will also continue working with Washington State Ferries to rebuild Coleman Dock, including a new passenger only terminal. The Marine Division has been very successful in getting federal grants for this project.

CONCLUSION

The 2017-2018 Proposed Budget lays the foundation to achieve the long-term vision for mobility in the region. By 2040 the region is expected to add another million people. To maintain King County's position as the economic engine of the state will require expanding investments in public transportation services and infrastructure.

The 2017-2018 Proposed Budget begins to build the organization and infrastructure to deliver on the METRO CONNECTS vision, while also delivering more for customers today. More than 300,000 hours of new service will be added over the next two years to address over-crowding and reliability, as well as to invest in corridors that do not meet the target service levels under current guidelines. In addition, the 2017-2018 Proposed Budget makes the capital and organizational investments necessary to achieve the long-term transit vision for the region.

The sustainable funding provided in the proposed budget will also allow the King County Marine Division to continue to provide an important transportation option to West Seattle and Vashon Island residents while alleviating traffic congestion in the downtown Seattle waterfront.

In addition, the proposed budget continues to enhance and expand environmentally sustainable travel options, continuing work funded largely by the 2014-2019 Parks Levy. Projects in the 2017-2018 Proposed Budget will address gaps in the Regional Trails System and enhance mobility connections between trails and transit, including investments in the Eastside Rail Corridor, Lake to Sound Trail, and Foothills Trail.

While resource limitations mean that the 2017-2018 budget for Roads focuses on life safety and addressing only the highest priority maintenance and preservation needs, the division will continue to look for efficiencies in service provision and support a legislative agenda for sustainable and sufficient funding. Unincorporated area roads will continue to be used by Metro Transit and other transportation providers as well as emergency and law enforcement to provide vital services; by residents to access transit, jobs, school, and other destinations; and by commerce to transport goods and services.