

Regional Transit Task Force Summary of Meeting

**September 16, 2010, 5:30 – 9:00 PM
Mercer Island Community Center**

Task Force members present: Gene Baxstrom*, Fred Butler, Grant Degginger, Kevin Desmond*, Bob Drewel, Chris Eggen, David Freiboth, Noel Gerken, Chris Hoffmann, Carl Jackson, Rob Johnson, Kate Joncas, Josh Kavanagh, Jane Kuechle, Ed Miller, Lynn Moody, Tom Pierson, Tom Rasmussen, Carla Saulter, Jared Smith, Jim Stanton, Bob Swarner, Greg Walker*, Larry Yok

Task Force members absent: Chuck Ayers, Shiv Batra, Suzette Cooke, Steve Marshall, Estela Ortega, Liz Warman

Facilitator: John Howell (Cedar River Group)

I. Welcome

The meeting was called to order at 5:40 p.m. John Howell welcomed Greg Walker from Sound Transit, who is replacing Ron Tober on the task force. Mr. Walker has attended several previous task force meetings and is familiar with the task force's charge and work so far. Mr. Howell asked task force members and attendees to introduce themselves, then reviewed the agenda for the meeting.

II. Direction from Last Meeting

Mr. Howell reviewed the handout titled "Overall Approach to Service Reduction and Service Growth." This flow chart summarizes the task force's discussion at recent meetings about how the broad policy guidance that the task force is charged with developing would be the basis for Metro to develop objective and transparent guidelines for growth and reduction in service. Based on those guidelines, Metro would also develop performance measures to evaluate the routes, the system as a whole, and for peer agency comparisons. This is the approach that the task force's discussion has suggested.

The task force will not define or review the guidelines. Developing guidelines would involve a public review process before adoption by elected officials. But the task force has begun to suggest some principles that might help to shape the guidelines. The task force will review some draft principles later in this meeting.

III. Discussion of Policy Direction Definitions

The task force discussed draft definitions of two of the terms used in the broad policy statements being crafted.

Geographic Value

"Geographic value" is the term that emerged from the last task force meeting as the preferred expression for considering geography in designing the transit system. The draft definition (see handout, "Definition of Geographic Value," draft 9/10/10) states that this term is multi-faceted, with three elements: tax equity, economic vitality, and balancing access with productivity.

In the discussion, task force members made the following points:

* Non-voting member

- **Support.** Like the term “geographic value.” Pleased with or at least willing to support the definition. It reflects the task force’s discussion. It works at the broad policy level.
- Since Metro will need additional revenue, it will need support both at the legislature and with voters. The task force members will need to actively support the new approach with legislators and voters, and champion it as a benefit in our own communities.
- **Add “integrated system.”** Add to the definition that a goal is having an integrated transit system that serves the region.
- **Tax equity.** A task force member asked what evidence there is that voters look for a correlation between their taxes and the services they get in their area. In response, task force members cited the discussions about the proposed map for Sound Transit 2 services, the comments that members of the public make online in response to news stories about government services, and questions that elected officials hear from constituents. Several members suggested that people need to see that they get something of value for what they pay—that the distribution of service is “fair,” whatever they understand that to mean. This discussion parallels that at the state level about the gas tax. While the legislature views transportation as a *state* system, individual residents need to feel there’s an attempt to deliver benefits.
- Tax equity should not be the only requirement for making service allocation decisions, but it needs to be considered since it is important to a lot of residents.
- One task force member suggested adding to the first sentence that distribution of services is “based on need.” Other members thought that this concept is covered already in the “balancing access with productivity” statement.
- Move tax equity to appear as the third of the three factors. Tax revenues come from the location where money is spent, which may be different from where taxpayers live. Metro as a community service, like police and hospitals, needs to serve the whole community. Rearranging the elements would move “economic vitality” to come first. Since many people understand that economic vitality is important for everyone, introducing this idea first sets the tone better for looking at transit as benefiting the whole region.
- Including “not an exact formula” in the tax equity description is important. We need to look across geographic boundaries to get the most efficient service for density, jobs and the transit dependent. The definition recognizes that fares as well as taxes generate revenues.
- The example of taxes for flood districts is helpful for explaining the tax revenues that go to Metro. Everyone in the county pays flood district taxes, but only some areas are in direct danger of flooding. Still, the region as a whole benefits by having flood protection. This example also shows why tax equity should not be an exact formula.
- Keep in mind that taxes also go to Sound Transit and ferries. Residents may need to be reminded about the broader transit system in the region.
- **Balancing access and productivity.** This balance is important. After reducing service, there will be a new floor based largely on performance. This approach helps all areas of the county.
- There was a question about what “market conditions” means in the “Balancing access and productivity” paragraph. It could include employment, population density and transit demand. These are the conditions that generate a “transit market.” It was suggested that the meaning be spelled out more clearly.
- There was a question about the wording “The public, including taxpayers who do not use transit.” The rationale is that many people who don’t use transit have supported ballot measures for transit. It’s important to acknowledge that general taxpayers see value in having transit.
- An important part of helping the public see the value of transit is to deliver on what is promised. Having transparent guidelines and reporting on performance measures will help the public see the value.

Mr. Howell summarized that there seems to be a strong consensus on the definition, with a few wording changes, such as adding “integrated regional transit” and being clearer about the term “transit market.” He acknowledged that there were a couple of comments about the listed order of the three elements of the definition, but that getting agreement on the basic definition is very important at this stage of the discussion.

Social Equity

Mr. Howell provided a definition of social equity that the Performance Measure subgroup developed. In addition, Josh Kavanagh e-mailed the task force an alternative draft definition based on his understanding of social equity and the U.S. Department of Transportation’s principles for environmental justice. (See “Social Equity & Environmental Justice: A Draft Definition.”) Mr. Kavanagh said that his goal was to address disadvantaged communities as broadly as possible and their whole trip, not just their residence. He clarified that his proposed definition is the paragraph at the top of the page. The discussion in the bottom third of the back provides background information on how he developed his draft.

In discussion, task force members made the following points:

- **Support for Mr. Kavanagh’s definition.** A number of members said they like that it addresses the broad range of people who need transit service and a wider range of destinations than just employment. It is succinct and captures the requirements in lay person’s terms. It defines the populations of concern clearly enough that Metro could develop guidelines for serving them.
- **Meaning of “civic engagement.”** Mr. Kavanagh said he was using this term for a wide range of travel purposes, including trips to faith institutions, libraries, courts, elected officials’ offices, and arts performances.
- **Title VI requirements.** Title VI of the Civil Rights Act requires that changes in transit service don’t disproportionately impact people of color and persons with disabilities. Title VI is the floor, while Mr. Kavanagh’s definition is a fuller explanation of what it means to fully integrate communities. Title VI requires asking whether transit is serving transit-dependent populations. Using the proposed definition of social equity means that we will ask this question at the start of planning.
- **“Priority.”** There were questions about what this term means in the draft definition, and whether it is needed. Some thought it indicated that social equity is not an afterthought but is fundamental to public transit. Others were concerned that the term suggests that the social equity factor would come first in decision making. Others suggested that the key will be in the details of how service is delivered and whether it serves the needs of those who depend on transit.
- **Youth and students.** A task force member suggested using the word “students” instead of or in addition to “youth.” Students face a unique set of challenges related to transit needs.

Mr. Howell summarized that there is a strong consensus favoring Mr. Kavanagh’s draft paragraph, with only the use of the word “priority” in question. Mr. Kavanagh offered to work on clarifying and refining the definition and will bring a new version to the next task force meeting.

IV. Emerging Policy Direction from Cost Control/Efficiency Subgroup

Mr. Howell introduced the handout titled “Emerging Policy Direction from the Cost Control/Efficiency SubGroup, Draft 09/14/10.” It represents the conclusions from this subgroup’s work. The task force has previously reviewed the first two statements on financial sustainability. The second two statements are new, based on the subgroup’s further work. Since there was not time for detailed discussion at this meeting, Mr. Howell asked for any general, quick reactions. The statements will be part of the task force’s recommendations, which the task force will review and discuss in the October meetings.

Task force members made the following comments:

- **Alternative service delivery (3^d bullet).** Don't see the value of this paragraph. It seems to contradict itself.
- This is a broader issue that will require time for the task force to discuss.
- **County overhead charges (4th bullet).** Like this text; there is a need for clarity in the county's overhead charges.
- The overhead charges are a broader issue for the county as whole. But they have a big effect on enterprise functions, such as transit.

Mr. Howell noted that the alternative service delivery question will be part of the agenda for the next task force meeting.

V. Principles to Shape Guidelines

Victor Obeso of Metro presented a draft of possible principles for the task force to recommend that would guide Metro's work in developing transit service guidelines. See the handout, "Regional Transit Task Force: Principles for King County Metro Transit Service Guidelines, Draft 9/14/10."

The slide on the overall approach to service reduction and growth shows how policy guidance is the basis for developing service guidelines. The task force will not be developing or reviewing guidelines. But there was a suggestion at the last meeting that the task force recommend some principles to help direct the process of developing the system guidelines. The handout is a draft of what those principles might be.

The principles are in two groups. The first group is introduced by "Guidelines will reflect." These are elements that are to be part of or to underlie the entire system of guidelines. These elements are: (1) transparency, clarity and measurability; (2) use of multiple factors; and (3) flexibility to address dynamic financial conditions.

The second group of principles is introduced by "Guidelines should incorporate." At least one guideline should address each of these elements. They reflect the transit system design factors, and the process for decision making. Each principle is intended to provide general direction without defining the guideline by using specific measures or thresholds.

Answers to Task Force members' questions:

- **Relationship to definitions.** The definitions of geographic value and social equity that the task force just worked on are at the higher, policy level. The descriptions in the principles explain how Metro will use the definitions to create guidelines for transit service.
- **Optimize vs. maximize productivity.** In the System Productivity description, to "optimize" productivity means to consider other factors (such as social equity and geographic value) in addition to straight productivity when planning the system. To "maximize" productivity would be to use productivity as the only planning factor.
- **Process for developing guidelines.** The service guidelines that Metro develops will go through a public comment process along with review by the County Council. The final recommended guidelines would be included in Metro's Strategic and Comprehensive Plan, scheduled to go to the County Council in February of 2011.
- **Task force role.** The task force is on the path of recommending the use of guidelines and performance measures. The proposed set of principles is a way for the task force to suggest what the guidelines should include. The principles would be part of the task force's recommendations, along with the broad policy guidance. For the performance measures, Metro has provided a start in defining them to show what they would be. The task force can decide whether to recommend that Metro continue to develop performance measures along the lines provided. The actual

- ***“Lead vs. follow” and land use principle.*** The lead/follow growth idea would be at the policy level. At the level of principles, the direction about land use is to take into account the local and regional long-range plans, along with current household and employment density.
- ***System productivity indicators.*** The three indicators listed under System Productivity are just examples. They could be deleted in the description without changing the meaning.

Task Force Comments:

- Regarding the Flexibility bullet, this might be interpreted to mean that when the economy improves, Metro would put back any service it cut during lean times.
- A task force member stated that he now agrees with the idea that the service guidelines used for reduction will establish a new floor, and that growth should occur starting at that point according to the new guidelines, rather than restoring service as it was before reductions.
- Several task force members suggested deleting all the “should incorporate” statements except possibly the last one (Decision-making and network changes). The other topics are the transit system design factors that the task force has been discussing, and will be described in the task force’s recommendations. Possibly the last principle (Decision-making and network changes) might be adequately covered by the first one (Transparency, clarity and measurability). Making these deletions would leave a shorter set of principles that would apply to all guidelines. After these general guidelines, there could just be a statement that “Guidelines will address:” and list the system design areas by name/topic without a description.
- Another member thought the brief descriptions of the system factors as principles were helpful and would help the County Council determine if Metro has accomplished the task of developing guidelines. However, economic development needs to be added to the principles list.

Mr. Howell summarized the discussion as general agreement to keep the first three principles and maybe the last one, and to list the seven system design factors as elements the guidelines must address. Until the task force sees the language about the system design factors that will be in the report, it’s hard to know whether having descriptions of the design factors in the principles would be helpful or not. The task force has discussed the system design factors in prior meetings, and the subgroups have done some further work at defining them. The task force will see these definitions in the draft recommendations for the report.

VI. Update on Metro Financial Forecast

Jim Jacobson of Metro presented information on the financial forecast. (See presentation slides, “Metro Financial Update,” September 15, 2010.) For the 2010/11 adopted budget, Metro identified \$60 million per year of ongoing “gap closing” measures. These measures include the scheduling efficiencies identified in the Auditor’s report. The August 2010 forecast shows a slightly larger sales tax revenue shortfall than was projected in the Adopted 2010/11 budget, with an additional cumulative loss of \$107 million by 2015. Based just on the sales tax projections, Metro would need to reduce service more than previously thought. But many other factors might change the picture for the better or worse, such as fuel prices, ridership, other changes in operating expenses, etc.

Answers to Task Force Members’ Questions:

- ***Cuts assumed.*** The forecast numbers assume that all the cost savings that have been identified to date will continue through 2015. The new forecast means that for the next biennial budget period, without additional revenues, Metro may need to find more cuts in order to maintain a

- **Outlook for 2011.** As long as the new sales tax forecast is correct and the economy does not go into a double-dip recession, Metro should be able to maintain the current budget through 2011.

VII. Overview of Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) Work on the State's Role in Public Transportation

Gene Baxstrom explained the study the JTC has underway on identifying the state's role in public transportation. (See handout, "Joint Transportation Committee – 2010 Legislative Interim Study: Identifying the state role in public transportation.") The purpose is to identify the best ways for the state to be involved in public transportation, including the highest priorities for investment, how to evaluate the effectiveness of those investments, and ways to improve connections throughout the state. The JTC has appointed a 29-member Advisory Panel of stakeholders to provide input and review the study. Parsons Brinckerhoff is conducting the study.

The Advisory Panel has meetings scheduled on September 29 and October 27. Agendas and meeting materials are on the JTC's Web site. One of the topics for discussion at the next meeting is performance metrics. A draft of the study report is due in late November, with the draft final to be presented to the JTC on December 8, 2010.

VIII. State/Federal Legislative Agenda and Funding Options

Mr. Obeso presented an overview on the potential legislative approach and funding options. (See the presentation, "Discussion of Legislative Approach and Funding," and the handout, "Transportation Funding: Current Revenue Mechanisms and Funding Options Executive Summary.") There will need to be new transit revenue sources if Metro is to avoid making additional service reductions, estimated to total 600,000 annual hours by 2015. There are both short-term and long-term revenue enhancement options, some of which would require legislative action.

The options presented are not a proposal or set of recommendations, but just examples. The task force will need to have a discussion about this topic at an upcoming meeting.

IX. Public Comment

Will Knedlik

Mr. Knedlik thanked the task force members for their hard work and focus on performance measures. He reported that two weeks ago, Ron Tober recommended to the Sound Transit Citizen Oversight Panel that the agency hand back to Metro the express bus routes that Sound Transit had taken over, along with a corresponding part of Sound Transit's 0.9 percent sales tax. Last year, half of Sound Transit's passengers took these express bus routes.

Mr. Knedlik said that in the last 10 years, Sound Transit has applied for and received more than a billion dollars in federal New Starts funds for bus rapid transit. He suggested that Metro take a serious look at the opportunity for federal grants. Additionally, he said that the state's transit study has identified 19 times more opportunity for van pools than is currently being used. He suggested that van pools would be a good option for expanding transit on the Eastside, and noted that van pools are "essentially free."

Doug McDonald

Mr. McDonald made four points about the regional transit system. First, the task force should be clear about what the region is, and think beyond King County. Second, when looking to integrate services, consider how to use the high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) system. Our region has a unique investment in

HOV, which is part of the larger state transportation system. Third, Metro needs to be viewed as part of the overall transportation system. Roads and HOV need to be priced for demand management. Fourth, people tend to view car ferries as part of the highway system, and passenger-only ferries as equivalent to buses. But the ferries from Bremerton and Bainbridge carry thousands of walk-on passengers each day.

X. Next Steps

The task force has meetings scheduled for October 7 and 21. Mr. Howell plans to have a draft set of recommendations for the task force's discussion at the October 7 meeting. But there are several topics the task force has only touched on that need further discussion. These include the policy statements on contracting out for services, and the legislative agenda.

He asked the task force members if they would be willing to participate in a third meeting in October if it is needed. Most of the task force members present seemed willing to consider an additional meeting. But there were schedule conflicts with having this additional meeting on the last Thursday in October (Oct. 28). Mr. Howell will send out a scheduling e-mail to find a date that works for most members.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.