

Regional Transit Task Force Summary of Meeting

**August 19, 2010, 5:30 – 8:30 p.m.
Mercer Island Community Center**

Task Force members present: Shiv Batra, Gene Baxstrom*, Fred Butler, Suzette Cooke, Grant Degginger, Kevin Desmond*, Chris Eggen, David Freiboth, Noel Gerken, Chris Hoffmann, Carl Jackson, Rob Johnson, Kate Joncas, Josh Kavanagh, Jane Kuechle, Steve Marshall, Ed Miller, Estela Ortega, Tom Pierson, Tom Rasmussen, Carla Saulter, Jared Smith, Bob Swarner, Ron Tober*, Larry Yok

Task Force members absent: Chuck Ayers, Bob Drewel, Lynn Moody, Jim Stanton, Liz Warman

Others present: John Resha (King County Council staff)

Facilitator: John Howell (Cedar River Group)

I. Welcome

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 p.m. John Howell asked task force members and attendees to introduce themselves. As a housekeeping item, Mr. Howell requested that task force members and attendees not have side conversations or step outside the room to do so. With such a large group, it can be hard for task force members to hear meeting speakers if there are other conversations taking place in the room.

Mr. Howell reviewed the agenda. He added as a new topic immediately before public comment the two requests from task force members for new/additional service reduction scenarios.

II. Follow-up on Request for Schedule Extension

After the consensus at the last meeting to ask for an extension of the task force through the end of October, Mr. Howell sent this request to the project Executive Committee (County Executive Constantine, and Council members Gossett, Hague, Patterson and Phillips). John Resha (King County Council staff) presented a letter with the committee's response. The committee thanked the task force for their commitment of time and effort. Although the extension would put some pressure on the timeline to develop and have meaningful public discussions about the 2012-13 biennium county budget, the Council and Executive are willing to accommodate the task force's request. Legislation has been introduced to amend the task force's work plan with this extension.

Mr. Howell reviewed an updated schedule and topics for task force meetings, with meetings added on October 7 and 21.

III. Discussion on Criteria for Potential Service Growth

To set the context for the discussion, Mr. Howell reminded the task force that the County Council charged the task force with recommending criteria both for potential service reduction and for service growth. At the last meeting, Victor Obeso of Metro presented potential policy criteria for service growth, which respond to the population and employment growth targets adopted as part of the regional *Vision 2040* Plan. Today's presentation uses those criteria to develop a rough picture of a portion of the system network in 10 years.

* Non-voting member

David Hull of Metro presented the staff's work on the 10-year growth concept. (See meeting handout "King County Metro System Growth Concept, August 19, 2010"). A key difference between the service reduction scenario that the task force reviewed and the growth concept is that with service reduction, Metro knows what the system is at the starting point (i.e., the current system) and what they need to achieve (service hours to be reduced to offset a budget shortfall). For the growth concept, however, they do not currently know what the starting point will be or what they will be aiming to achieve (number of service hours to be added to accommodate regional growth).

The keys to planning for growth are to use the policy direction to develop standards and guidelines for service investments and changes, and an objective and transparent decision-making process in applying those standards and guidelines. The growth concept uses the proposed policy direction that the task force has been developing. This direction is to: (1) emphasize productivity, due to its linkage to economic development, land use and financial sustainability; (2) ensure social equity; and (3) provide geographic balance by supporting the land use and growth assumptions in Vision 2040 (slide 4 in the handout). For the sake of simplicity, the growth concept presented focuses only on Metro's "frequent" family of services, not on the commuter or hourly service families.

Slide 5 ("Establishing Service Growth Policies: Comprehensive and Strategic Plan Update") shows the process to take the growth concept to implementation. The process moves from policy direction to service standards and guidelines, to performance measures, to monitoring, to reporting results. The last step in the process would create a feedback loop, as the results might suggest changes to the service guidelines.

The growth concept addresses two types of service growth (slide 6): (1) service growth to respond to ridership demand (the "follow" concept), and (2) service growth to support regional growth (the "lead" concept). To respond to ridership demand, Metro would set thresholds for passenger load (number of seats filled and standees) for each service type. When a threshold is exceeded, Metro would choose among several options for adding service. (See slide 8, "Respond to Demand.")

For the second type of service growth (supporting regional growth), Metro would set guidelines that address employment, housing density, social equity and network connectivity. For each guideline, Metro would develop a point system to score how well a route or service meets the criteria set by the guidelines. Metro would gauge the minimum frequency of service on a route to the number of points it scores. (See slide 6 for a table relating the number of points to different minimum service levels.) Slides 9 – 14 provide a proposed set of guidelines, and the scoring method and one example for each guideline. The proposed guidelines are:

1. **Metropolitan cities:** Corridor serves a metropolitan city's Urban or Manufacturing Center with more than 15,000 jobs (yes or no).
2. **Core city urban centers:** Corridor services a core City Urban Center, with the score depending on whether employment (number of jobs) is at a high, medium or low level.
3. **Residential density:** Corridor serves high density residential neighborhoods, with the score high, medium or low as determined by number of census block groups at a particular level of households per acre.
4. **Network connectivity:** Corridor provides a unique network connection between at least two other frequent corridors (yes or no).

5. **Social equity:** Corridor meets minority and/or low-income designation when 50 percent of the census blocks have minority or low-income populations that are above the countywide average. The score rates whether the corridor serves minority *and* low income, just one of these, or neither.
6. **Special locations:** Corridor serves large ridership generators outside of urban centers. These generators include hospitals, educational institutions, shopping and recreation sites, and major transit centers, park and ride lots, and rail stations. The score would depend on whether the corridor serves two or more large ridership generators, one of these, or none.

Another aspect of planning for growth is to integrate Metro's services with Sound Transit's Link light rail extensions to Northgate on the north and to Overlake on the east, which are to open in 2021. The light rail extension to Northgate in particular would enable Metro to redeploy some of the service hours it now provides to this corridor.

Slides 16 – 17 in the presentation show Metro's current frequent arterial corridors on a map, and indicate which ones would meet the service guidelines, which do not, and which ones currently have the frequency that corresponds to the proposed scoring criteria. Slide 18 shows on a map the frequent arterial corridors where redeployment would occur in order to integrate with Sound Transit's light rail.

Slide 19 provides a table with the estimated hours of service that would be added by subarea for the "frequent arterial" family of service in order to meet the two kinds of growth proposed: "lead" (promoting growth) and "follow" (responding to demand). The results show that a total of 394,000 hours of "frequent" service would be added, with 36 percent in the East, 34 percent in the South and 30 percent in the West. These numbers do not include redeployment to integrate with Sound Transit's light rail.

Answers to Task Force members' questions:

- *Frequent Arterial Corridors maps:* There were a number of questions to help task force members understand the different colors and solid vs. dotted lines of frequent corridors on the maps. Both the blue lines and the red lines show current Metro frequent arterial corridors. The blue lines (whether solid or dotted) meet the standards of the proposed six guidelines; the red lines (whether solid or dotted) do not currently meet all the guidelines. The solid lines (blue or red) currently have the frequency of service that fits with the score they would receive under the guidelines; the dotted lines do not currently have the frequency of service for their score level.
- *"Minimum frequency" corridors:* The sum of points on all of the guidelines is what determines the threshold or minimum frequency. So the minimum frequency corridors reach this level not just on productivity but also on social equity and network connectivity.
- *Guidelines and productivity:* Productivity is built into the scoring system. The more productive a corridor is, the more points it will score. Productivity may be increased by some of the other criteria, such as social equity. The routes that serve low-income areas, for example, can be very productive since these are high-demand areas. Serving high-employment areas can be very productive. For example in Seattle and Bellevue-Overlake, employment is in concentrated areas. In the South subarea, however, employment is more spread out, so service to employment areas would not be as productive; that is, the buses would not be as full.
- *Difference from current policy:* Current policy would allocate new service based on the geographical 40-40-20 allocation. The proposed growth concept would not make service decisions based on a geographical allocation, but based on either ridership demand or on the guidelines to support regional growth.

- *Past efforts to add service:* The past policy has been to add service per the 40-40-20 allocation in underserved areas where transit can make a difference. The new service is determined through an interactive process with the community. Some new service has gotten good ridership immediately. When ridership doesn't meet expectations, Metro looks for ways to revise it that would improve ridership.
- *Choice of guidelines:* There are other possible guidelines to support growth, but the ones presented are those that Metro staff thought best suited the policy direction the task force has expressed so far. The concept presented is only for the frequent arterial family of service, though. There would be some differences in guidelines for the other families of service. However, it is important to note that these are *sample* guidelines to illustrate how the process would work. A proposed set of guidelines would receive public review and be approved by the County Council.
- *Assessment of success and revisions:* The new plan would identify not just the guidelines, but also the performance measures that would help to gauge success (see process in slide 5). If a route fell below the guidelines or did not meet the appropriate performance measure, Metro would re-evaluate it and make changes as needed.
- *Redeployment to integrate with Sound Transit:* The decision to redeploy service was through a motion passed by the County Council in 2000. The idea was to reconfigure Metro service to help feed the high-capacity transit model of Sound Transit, and not to duplicate service. In developing the proposed growth concept, the staff assumed that this policy would still be in place.

Discussion

Below are the topics that emerged from and points raised in the task force's discussion.

General support for concepts presented:

- Many task force members liked the general approach to system growth that was presented.
- Specific aspects that task force members liked were:
 - It provides a mechanism to respond to changes in conditions.
 - It builds social equity into the guidelines for growth.
 - The guidelines are transparent and the point system to score each corridor is clear.
 - It uses transit to support growth management.
- Some task force members said their support was qualified because of concerns about fairness to subareas, and about how the concept will be fleshed out for all the service families.

Geographic equity/balance/fairness:

- The task force needs to agree on a definition of geographic equity or balance. There are currently some different views on this concept. One suggestion was to define equity for geographical areas as providing the type of service needed at the frequency the community needs.
- Don't tie geographic balance to Vision 2040, such as in slide 4. These should be separate factors.
- The guidelines should be applied equally across the county, not starting with the inequitable base we have now. It's not clear how the growth concept would benefit areas that are currently underserved. It may be that the ridership isn't there because the service isn't there. How would the guidelines help?
- Could the growth guidelines be used with 40-40-20, such as by applying the point system to make decisions within each subarea?
- We need to keep an eye on how the policy would affect each subarea; local leaders will want to know.

- Need to be clear about the geographical areas where revenues come from and where the resources go. Also look at other opportunities for revenue.
- Perhaps there needs to be a check-and-balance mechanism by subarea, such as comparing the tax dollars received from a subarea to the amount of service provided. We need to take a regional approach, but people in each subarea still need to think that it is fair and equitable to them.

Land use and growth:

- Not sure that the creation of routes for growth as presented is closely related to GMA.
- Perhaps use the term “shape” instead of “lead” since the goal is to shape land use.
- “Shape” would be a nonstarter. Land use issues are local; cities need to be able to make their own decisions on land use.
- The guidelines are good because they are clear. They would be incentives for local communities. But transit should not try to dictate land use/zoning.
- Transit policies need to be clear and consistent so that local communities can take them into account in their planning. Local leaders need to know that if they designate an area for growth or create density, there will be transit to serve it. Service additions could be incremental, but there would need to be a commitment to serving the area.
- Transit itself can create density with park-and-rides. We should look at other ways that transit can “lead” growth.

Other:

- Would like to see how private buses and other services fit in.
- Would like to see how the concept looks at the other families of transit service and their balance among the subareas.

Restoration of service:

- Service cuts will reset the baseline. Restoration should start from that new baseline and use the new approach for service growth in restoring service.

Concerns:

- The scoring system for the guidelines could be the subject of political fights and manipulation. “The devil is in the details.”
- We need to decide what social equity is. None of the guidelines seem to address the age of riders (seniors or youth) or service for persons with disabilities. The goal should be to provide fixed route service so these groups don’t need to depend on Access service.
- Is slide 17 (“Frequent Arterial Corridors Investments to Meet Minimum Frequencies”) consistent with the productivity idea that the Performance Measures Subgroup has proposed?
- Are we applying the criteria to the base of the existing routes?
- In the redeployment decision, there is an assumption that light rail works as well for riders as the buses did. This is not the case for the elderly, youth and the disabled. In many cases they have longer walks to reach the nearest light rail stop.
- The concerns expressed revolve around trust and fairness.

Tom Rasmussen handed out a discussion paper with the City of Seattle’s responses to the questions raised at the end of the growth concept presentation. Many of the points raised in the task force’s discussion are reflected in this paper.

As a summary of the discussion, Mr. Howell said that it appears that most of the task force members who spoke generally like the growth concept, especially the set of transparent guidelines for how allocations would be made, and using clear performance measures to assess how well the system is doing. There seemed to be three gradations of support, however: (1) like the approach; (2) looks good, but the devil is in the details; (3) it needs a geographic view, especially if applying the guidelines would yield a dramatically different result than would a 40-40-20 allocation. Also important are the concepts of fairness and trust.

IV. Requests for Additional Reduction Scenario

Mr. Howell noted that two task force members have asked Metro to develop additional scenarios for possible service reductions. Rather than do multiple individual scenarios, Mr. Howell and Metro staff proposed creating the “bookends” for what service reduction would look like if Metro (1) used only productivity to make reduction decisions, no matter what effect that had on subareas; and (2) used the current policy only, which would reduce service 20 percent in the East, 20 percent in the South, and 60 percent in the West, no matter what the effect on productivity.

Some task force members asked if there could be a reduction scenario based on the factors described in the service growth concept, or if these factors could be applied by subarea as a second decision level below the 20-20-60 reduction. Others suggested that the growth concept does not work well for reduction because it is not equitable across subareas. In response to a question about how a route is counted if it crosses a subarea boundary, Mr. Hull said that in the past, Metro has counted it as being half in each of the two subareas.

Some task force members questioned the need for the “bookend” scenarios and suggested instead revising the R1 scenario that Metro provided previously to show more clearly the guidelines they used to develop it. Others said that it would help to address concerns if people in the subareas could see what the extremes (strictly productivity and strictly current policy) would look like. A number of task force members said they would like to see the bookend scenarios for reduction. Mr. Howell summarized the consensus as: (1) create the bookend scenarios; and (2) ask Metro to clarify the guidelines used to develop the R1 scenario.

V. Overview of Funding Options Paper

In regard to the draft funding options paper (“Transportation Funding: Current Revenue Mechanisms and Funding Options”), Mr. Howell said that this paper is an initial list of the current and potential funding sources for Metro. It is intended to show what the range of options is. It is not meant to suggest recommended options. Task force members should send any questions or suggestions to Kevin Desmond, since both Mr. Howell and Victor Obeso will be on vacation next week.

VI. Public Comment

David Elliott

Mr. Elliott has served on Metro’s Transit Advisory Committee for five years, as a City of Bellevue Transportation Commissioner for eight years, and as commercial realtor for 20 years, the last 14 of which have been in South King County. He urged the task force to make sure there is adequate focus on transit service for South King County, including the cities of Renton, Tukwila, Kent, Auburn, Pacific and Algona, extending to Sumner in Pierce County. He pointed out that South King County is the largest business (manufacturing and warehousing) area in the state of Washington, the sixth largest industrial area in the United States, and, prior to the economic collapse, was the fourth fastest growing. The area has in

excess of 100 million square feet of industrial space, and at the peak had an employment base of more than 40,000. By comparison, he said that the Eastside has approximately 20 million square feet of mixed-use office/warehouse space, and Seattle south of Safeco Field (including South Park) has approximately 35 to 40 million square feet of mostly manufacturing/ warehouse space. South King County is served by roads and transit, with the main transit routes on 84th Ave. South (East Valley Highway) and 68th Ave. South (West Valley Highway – State Route 181). Mr. Elliott suggested that other routes will be worth of consideration in the future, and that when the economy rebounds, the transit system will need to fully support South King County as an essential and growing sector in King County's overall economy.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.