

# **Ride Free Area Implementation Plan**

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King County Executive  
King County Council

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## Executive Summary

The transit Ride Free Area (RFA) in downtown Seattle is scheduled to be eliminated on Sept. 29, 2012. At the same time, Metro will change to a pay-on-entry fare payment system throughout its service area. These changes will increase fare revenue for King County Metro (Metro) and will make fare payment simpler for customers to understand. The elimination of the RFA will also require major changes in operations and customer habits.

To make sure the changes go smoothly, Metro has been engaging the public, partner transit agencies, the City of Seattle, human services and health agencies, and others to develop strategies to manage the change. Where possible, over the past several months Metro has been developing, testing and implementing examples of these strategies, and establishing timelines that will ensure they will be completed in time for a successful transition.

The change to “pay on entry” could affect boarding and travel times on both surface streets and in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel (DSTT), and Metro is planning operational changes to ensure smooth operations downtown:

- Modify operations and reduce peak-period bus volumes in the DSTT.
- Improve bus zones and traffic signal timing on surface streets.
- Consider changes to make pay-on-entry fare collection in downtown Seattle fast and easy.
- Require riders to carry proof that they have paid a fare.

Despite these mitigation measures, transit service may be slower in downtown Seattle on both surface streets and in the DSTT after the RFA ends. Although customers may experience increased travel times in downtown, this increase may be off-set for some customers by faster all-door exiting at destinations such as park-and-rides and transit centers. It is also likely that customers will experience less reliable transit service, and possibly delays, during the adjustment period after the change to a pay-on-entry system and elimination of the RFA.

Public communication, employee training, community outreach, and coordination with partner agencies are critically important, and Metro is implementing a separate set of strategies in these areas:

- Implement a communication plan that targets customers and other key audiences, defines key messages, and phases communications using a variety of tools.
- Train Metro operators and other employees so they can be resources to customers.
- Coordinate with partner agencies—the City of Seattle, Sound Transit and Community Transit—to ensure that customer information is accurate and consistent.
- Inform employers, downtown businesses and other stakeholders about the upcoming changes. This effort will include promotion of ORCA card use, which will speed boarding when pay-on-entry begins.

A third set of strategies is intended to mitigate the impacts that elimination of the RFA could have on low- and no-income people who currently use free bus service in downtown Seattle.

- Use Metro's existing transportation assistance programs (Regional Reduced Fare Permits for seniors and people with disabilities and the King County Human Services Ticket Program)
- Explore mitigation options:
  - Increase the subsidy available through the Human Services Ticket Program.
  - Help the City of Seattle develop a downtown circulator.
  - Provide donated vehicles to specific agencies as appropriate.

# Introduction

This report presents the background, analysis and implementation plan for elimination of the Ride Free Area in downtown Seattle. It was developed in response to Section 11 of Ordinance 17169:

## SECTION 11:

- A. *The executive is requested to discontinue the downtown Seattle ride free area by October 2012 and to develop and submit to council by May 2012 an implementation plan to guide the elimination of the ride free area. The plan should be filed in the form of a paper original and an electronic copy with the clerk of the council, who shall retain the original and provide an electronic copy to all councilmembers.*
  
- B. *The implementation plan may include, but is not limited to the following elements to ensure a smooth transition:*
  - 1. *Outreach and coordination with downtown Seattle human services agencies, including a description of a partner program or programs designed to help mitigate the increased cost of trips in downtown Seattle for disadvantaged populations;*
  - 2. *Consideration of an increase in the number of trips or level of subsidy available through the human services ticket program;*
  - 3. *Outreach with downtown businesses, including further promotion of the ORCA card system;*
  - 4. *Coordination with the city of Seattle and affected transit agencies;*
  - 5. *A customer information plan to help riders transition to the new fare collection procedures in downtown Seattle;*
  - 6. *Descriptions of any transit route and facility modifications; and*
  - 7. *Employee training.*
  
- C. *In order for the city of Seattle to continue to benefit from the ride free area in downtown Seattle, the city must negotiate a new methodology that accurately off-sets the cost of service and that acknowledges the minimal benefit to the county in providing these services.*

The ordinance requests that Metro eliminate the RFA or negotiate a new agreement with the City of Seattle to cover the cost of operation. The City of Seattle has indicated it is not in a position to negotiate a new agreement to maintain the Ride Free Area. As a result, Metro is proceeding with the elimination of the RFA scheduled for September 29, 2012.

At the same time the RFA is scheduled to be eliminated, Metro will move to a pay-on-entry system at all times to be consistent with current pay-on-entry practices on inbound buses outside the downtown area. Riders will always pay when they enter the bus. Metro will be requiring passengers to enter through the front door and encouraging them to exit through the rear doors when possible to streamline boarding.

## **Background**

The Ride Free Area was started at the request of the City of Seattle in July 1973 to enhance employee, visitor and resident circulation within the downtown core and to improve retail activity. The city agreed to pay King County Metro's operating deficit for the free service: \$64,000. This amount was equivalent to the annual revenue from the Dime Shuttle once operated downtown by Seattle Transit, which folded into Metro.

Subsequent RFA agreements were based on the annual number of trips in the RFA. The amount increased annually in proportion to the increase in total ridership in Seattle. The city's payments for the RFA grew from \$64,000 in 1974 to \$364,000 in 1982. From 1977 to 1982, the city's payments also covered a reduced-fare shuttle to the Kingdome. After 1982, the shuttle payments were handled separately. In January 1978, the RFA boundary was extended to Battery Street. The City of Seattle agreed to pay for this extension from 1978 to 1982.

In 1982, the Seattle City Council convened a task force to review the RFA, recommend if it should continue, and examine its financial status. The task force determined that the RFA should continue and that the compensation from the city should reflect the operational savings for transit resulting from increased travel speeds through downtown. After this review, the city's contributions increased from \$100,000 to \$150,000 from 1984 to 1989. The increases were based on estimates of Metro's revenue losses and changes in operating costs resulting from operating the RFA.

For the past 14 years, the city's payment has been adjusted only for inflation; it has not been recalculated based on fare revenue loss to Metro since 1998. The city paid a \$393,500 subsidy in 2010.

### **RFA ridership**

In 2010, Metro conducted in-person interviews and used ridership data to estimate the number of boardings in the RFA. This report, Ride Free Area Ridership and Revenue Estimates, estimated there were 8.4 million boardings in the RFA in 2010. Approximately 2.8 million of the 8.4 million annual boardings were made by people who had not already paid for their trip with a transfer or a pass. Of these 2.8 million boardings, 40 percent of the people said they would be willing to pay to use a bus in the downtown area. The remaining 60 percent said they would not use the bus if they had to pay.

### **2009 King County performance audit**

The 2009 King County Performance Audit of Transit required Metro to update the formula used to assess the City of Seattle's payment for the RFA.

“Transit should update and fully document the formula used to assess the City of Seattle's payment for the Downtown Seattle Ride Free Area to reflect current ridership and operating conditions including trips that are attracted by virtue of free fares. Transit and the council should then consider revising the agreement with the City of Seattle.” (A13)

Preliminary analysis from the audit indicated that Metro could potentially gain \$2.2 million per year in additional revenue if the RFA were eliminated, including the loss of fare revenue, fare evasion and operational costs.

### **Congestion reduction charge ordinance**

On August 16, 2011, the King County Council approved Ordinance 17169, enacting the two-year congestion reduction charge, an annual \$20 vehicle license fee to preserve transit service in King County. The ordinance also directed Metro to take additional steps to improve efficiency. This funding helped to prevent a 17 percent reduction in transit service that would have led to a loss of 9 million passenger trips annually.

When the County Council approved this charge, it also requested that Metro discontinue the RFA by October 2012 if the county was unable to negotiate an agreement with the City of Seattle using a new methodology that accurately off-set the cost of service and acknowledged the minimal benefit to the county in providing these services.

The City of Seattle has indicated that it is not in a position to negotiate a new agreement to maintain the RFA. As a result, Metro is proceeding with the elimination of the RFA scheduled for September 29, 2012.

### **Key implementation issues**

Metro has been working with the public, partner transit agencies, the City of Seattle, human services and health agencies, and others to develop a plan for a smooth transition to the elimination of the RFA and change to pay-on-entry.

Based on this work, Metro has identified three key issues concerning elimination of the RFA:

- **Ensuring smooth operations in downtown Seattle:** Currently, Metro operates the RFA with all-door boarding, allowing passengers to use any door to board or deboard a coach, which expedites the boarding process and keeps dwell times short. Conducting loading and fare collection only at the front door is slower than all-door boarding. This will result in longer dwell times for buses at downtown Seattle bus zones and slower service through the downtown core.
- **Delivering clear communications:** Elimination of the RFA and the change to a pay-on-entry system will have widespread effects, and communication and outreach to customers, employees, downtown businesses, partner agencies, and other key audiences is crucially important for a successful transition.
- **Mitigating impacts to low- and no-income riders in downtown Seattle:** Some people use the free bus service in downtown Seattle to access needed services. This plan addresses options to continue providing access to and from human services for people with low and no income.

# Ensuring Smooth Operations in Downtown Seattle

With elimination of the Ride Free Area, bus riders will be required to pay on entry at all times and will no longer be able to use all-door boarding to enter the bus. Riders will be required to enter the front door and encouraged to exit the rear door whenever possible. As a result of riders paying on entry, travel times on surface streets and in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel are expected to increase, particularly during the afternoon and evening commute period. Metro has identified mitigation strategies for the DSTT, surface streets, fare payment and fare enforcement to keep this increase to a minimum.

## Strategies

Metro has identified several changes to minimize travel-time increases expected with elimination of the RFA and conversion to a pay-on-entry system.

- **Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel:** Metro has changed the DSTT signal system and the way buses and trains are scheduled in the tunnel during the evening commute. Bus bays will be moved to more effectively accommodate riders and buses, and the number of buses in the tunnel will be reduced.
- **Surface streets:** Metro will make bus zone improvements and work with the City of Seattle to improve signal timing along Third Avenue.
- **Fare collection:** Metro will modify ORCA settings on some trips and will consider using loaders at selected times.
- **Fare enforcement:** Metro Transit Police will provide focused fare-evasion patrols in downtown Seattle following the RFA elimination.

The timeline for implementing these strategies will vary. While Metro continues to evaluate some strategies, others are ready for implementation immediately, during the summer service change, or when the RFA is eliminated in September.

## DSTT simulations and strategies

Metro conducted a series of simulation tests in the DSTT to assess the impacts that elimination of the RFA could have on boarding and travel time, and to test the effectiveness of various mitigation strategies. The first series of simulations in the DSTT was conducted in early 2011, and a second series was conducted between November 2011 and January 2012.

During these simulations, various operational improvements were put in place to determine their effect on dwell times and travel times through the DSTT. These operational improvements included:

- **Bus platooning:** monitoring the order of buses entering the DSTT tunnel. Frequently, buses serving the front bay are blocked by buses serving the rear bay. In the simulation, service supervisors directed buses when to enter the tunnel and held coaches from entering the tunnel when southbound Sound Transit Link trains were ready to leave the stub tunnel.

- **Shorten the Link security sweep at Westlake Station:** reducing the Link dwell time by expediting the sweep of the train. Typically, a Link operator and security guard perform a sweep of the train when it enters the station. During the simulation, a second security guard was assigned to sweep the train so the operator did not have to leave the cab.
- **Allowing drop-off coaches to stop at any bay:** All coaches terminating in downtown Seattle are assigned to a particular bay at each station. In the simulation, the terminating coaches, which mainly drop off passengers, were instructed to pull as far forward on the platform as possible to maximize the use of station platform space.
- **Modifying bay locations:** moving the rear bay location further up the platform to accommodate an additional bus loading and unloading at the platform.

Metro identified additional operational adjustments necessary to keep buses moving through the DSTT. These adjustments include moving routes from the DSTT to surface streets and refreshing and revising pavement markings to clarify for bus operators where to position buses near traffic signals.

The chart below summarizes the mitigation strategies that Metro will pursue to ensure smooth operations in the DSTT when pay on entry starts in downtown Seattle.

<b>Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel – Mitigation Strategies</b>	
<b>Scheduled for implementation</b>	<b>Platoon buses</b> Monitor order of coaches entering the tunnel
	<b>Allow drop-off coaches to stop at any bay</b> Maximize use of station platforms and minimize blockages
	<b>Modify rear bay locations</b> Accommodate third coach for rear bays
	<b>Move routes from tunnel to surface</b> Metro plans to remove five to eight coaches in each direction per peak hour from the tunnel.
	<b>Refresh and revise pavement marking</b> Provide clear instructions for bus operators where to wait for traffic signals in the DSTT
<b>Still under consideration</b>	<b>Reduce Link light rail dwell time at Westlake Station</b> Modify procedures or staffing northbound at Westlake Station to reduce Link dwell times

### **Surface street improvements**

Metro conducted a series of simulations in the summer of 2010 to evaluate the impacts that pay-on-entry could have on surface-street operations. Based on these tests, the estimated travel times of buses running on surface streets in downtown Seattle could be expected to increase by two to four minutes and will continue to fluctuate day-to-day as they do currently. To minimize the increased dwell times, Metro has identified a series of mitigation measures to expedite bus movement on downtown Seattle surface streets:

- **Zone improvements:** Metro is evaluating bus stop operations to adjust the number of buses stopping at the busiest bus stops and minimize blockages. The Third Avenue transit spine carries high volumes of buses through downtown Seattle. Zone improvements will be focused on Third Avenue, Olive Way, Columbia Street, and Jackson Street. These locations have been identified as chokepoints for bus traffic moving through downtown Seattle.
- **Signal improvements:** Metro is working with the City of Seattle to adjust traffic signal timing to keep buses moving through the downtown area. Signals will be retimed along the corridor to optimize bus movement through the corridor or to reduce conflict between coaches turning right and pedestrian crossings.

The chart below summarizes the mitigation strategies and timeline for improving operations on downtown Seattle surface streets in coordination with a transition to a pay-on-entry system.

Surface Street Improvements Mitigation Strategies	
<b>Scheduled for implementation</b>	<b>Improve signals</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adjust traffic signal timing to improve turn movements</li> <li>▪ Add traffic signs when applicable</li> </ul>
<b>Still under consideration</b>	<b>Improve bus zones</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Third Avenue southbound between Pine and Pike streets</li> <li>▪ Third Avenue northbound between Pine and Stewart streets</li> <li>▪ Balance bus volumes stopping at busiest stop locations</li> </ul>

### Fare payment

Metro will be improving other operational procedures to keep buses moving and to minimize blockages through downtown Seattle. Currently, customer use of ORCA cards for boarding is about 60 percent system-wide, with estimated ORCA usage in the DSTT at about 65 percent.

- **Portable fare transaction processors:** During the DSTT simulations, peak period travel times increase with simulated pay on entry, with a significant spike between 5 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. By estimating the possible travel time savings if fare collectors were present, Metro determined that travel times and reliability could be improved during the peak period by allowing some riders to board selected routes at the back door, with employees using hand-held ORCA readers to collect their fares.
- **Increased use of ORCA:** Metro will encourage increased use of ORCA cards to simplify and improve fare payment throughout the system. With all customers paying on entry, the ORCA card can help speed up boarding since all that is required is a simple tap of the card on the reader near the front door. To encourage expanded use of ORCA, Metro is considering the installation of up to 11 additional ticket vending machines that would sell and revalue adult fare ORCA cards. Metro is currently developing a list of potential locations including sites within downtown Seattle.

While increasing the number of ORCA users will help streamline fare payment, it does not address all the issues associated with fare payment, including Metro’s two-zone fare system. The two-zone fare system can be difficult for riders to understand and slows transit operations and fare payment.

Currently, ORCA readers and fare boxes have a default setting during the peak periods of either a one- or two-zone fare, depending upon the route and where it operates. This fare is charged to riders using an ORCA E-purse unless manually overridden by the operator. To pay a fare that is different than the default fare setting, the customer must ask the driver for a fare exception, which requires the driver to adjust the settings on the reader before the card is tapped. With pay on entry downtown, requests for fare exceptions would increase the time that buses remain at a stop.

To address this issue, Metro must balance the need to minimize dwell times, maximize fares and ease communications between drivers and customers. Metro is evaluating a change in the default fare-set that would apply to as many as 16 routes that operate in the downtown and carry both one- and two-zone riders in the peak. In the future, Metro may consider eliminating the two-zone fare system to further simplify the fare payment process.

In addition to improving fare payment and fare-set processes, Metro will be looking at other strategies including increased fare enforcement and a requirement that customers show they have paid a fare.

**Fare enforcement**

Metro Transit Police will provide focused fare-evasion patrols in downtown Seattle for a two- to three-month period after the RFA is eliminated. Fare-evasion patrols will be increased in two forms: uniformed Metro Transit Police deputies will be posted at high-volume locations, especially during peak hours, and plain clothes deputies will be riding coaches in the downtown Seattle area. Deputies will help educate riders about the new pay-on-entry system, identify evaders, and enforce fare payment. There will be an additional focused patrol presence to support fare enforcement officers on the RapidRide C and D lines, which will begin operating through downtown Seattle on Sept. 29.

Metro is also considering requiring customers to show that they have paid a fare, either with a paper transfer for cash-paying customers or with their ORCA card.

<b>Fare Payment and Enforcement - Mitigation Strategies</b>	
<b>Scheduled for implementation</b>	<p><b>Modify fare-set for selected routes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Set fares at one-zone for more outbound trips during the evening commute.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Increased use of ORCA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Encourage increased use of ORCA cards for fare payment</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Focused fare-evasion patrols</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Uniformed deputies at locations with high rider volumes</li> <li>▪ More plain clothes deputies</li> <li>▪ Support of fare enforcement officers on RapidRide C and D lines in downtown Seattle</li> </ul>

<b>Fare Payment and Enforcement - Mitigation Strategies (Continued)</b>	
<b>Still under consideration</b>	<p><b>Use of portable fare transaction processors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Staff would be equipped with portable ORCA readers to allow some passengers to board through the back door at key DSTT locations</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Increased use of ORCA – ticket vending machines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Evaluate potential use of ticket vending machines at major bus stops in downtown Seattle.</li> <li>▪ Providing a map with ORCA ticket sale/revalue locations.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Requiring proof of fare payment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Evaluate system-wide change to provide cash-paying customers with paper transfers</li> </ul>

## **Delivering Clear Communications**

The elimination of the Ride Free Area and change to pay-on-entry throughout the Metro system will affect almost every bus rider in King County, along with many other individuals, groups and agencies. Among those who will be most affected are regular bus riders who commute to and from Seattle, people with little or no income who use the free bus service to access essential services downtown, and operations staff from the transit agencies who provide downtown service.

A successful transition will depend on clear communication and coordination with all of those affected.

### **Communication plan**

Metro has developed a comprehensive communication plan to reach out to all affected by the transit changes—particularly those in downtown Seattle. The plan identifies the following audiences: transit customers, operations staff, low-income populations, human services and health agencies, transportation partners, stakeholders and community leaders.

Key messages and communication goals are identified for each audience, along with a timeline of activities. Communications with transit customers will focus on these key messages:

- Bus trips will no longer be free in downtown Seattle, helping Metro preserve bus service by saving money and reducing fare evasion.
- Metro is changing to a pay-on-entry system everywhere, including downtown Seattle. Fare payment will be consistent throughout the Metro system—pay when you enter the bus for all trips.
- Using ORCA is the quickest ways to board and transfer.
- Be ready to pay before you board.
- Exit through the rear door, whenever possible, particularly in downtown Seattle.

Starting with a public open house held March 29, Metro and its partners have planned a six-month campaign to educate bus riders about the changes. This will include:

- Signs on buses and at bus stops and transit centers.
- Updates on the Metro, Sound Transit, and Community Transit websites.
- Information in the summer and fall transit service-change materials.
- E-mail and text message Transit Alerts sent to subscribers.
- Notifications to tourist and visitor groups, and updates to the Metro visitor’s guide.
- Outreach to other transportation agencies, human services organizations, community groups, and employer networks.
- Encouraging the use of ORCA cards to speed up boarding.

Metro is updating its visitor’s guide for September, and anticipates publishing a new downtown bus service brochure that has new fare payment information and all the service revisions for fall,

including the RapidRide C and D lines and restructuring of many existing bus routes. Metro will also be working with the hospitality industry to provide clear information for tourists about where to purchase ORCA fare cards. As with other major transit systems, tourists can purchase ORCA cards at various centers of transit activity: all downtown tunnel stations, Link stations, and Metro customer service centers.

Metro is working with Sound Transit, Community Transit and other transit agencies to ensure that their materials incorporate consistent information about elimination of the RFA.

Metro is also informing employers, downtown businesses, Downtown Seattle Association, Seattle Chamber of Commerce, Suburban Cities Association, and Metro's advisory and subarea committees about the planned elimination of the RFA and switch to a pay-on-entry system. Metro will explain the benefits of a common fare payment process and make sure these groups are aware of transportation assistance options in the downtown Seattle area.

### **Partner agency coordination**

Metro has been actively working with partner agencies—the City of Seattle, Sound Transit, Community Transit and other transportation agencies—to address operational issues in the DSTT and downtown surface streets. As operational plans are developed, the partners are working together to keep customers and all affected parties informed. The partner agencies jointly sponsored the March 29 public open house.

Metro will also coordinate with its partner agencies to clearly and consistently communicate that bus rides will no longer be free downtown for any transit agency and that ORCA cards are the fastest way to pay fare and make transfers. Internally, Metro and partner agencies will ensure that procedures are in place to deal with fare disputes and will share information that helps all the agencies better serve customers and operate more efficiently.

### **Transit agency front-line staff and other employees**

As the RFA is eliminated and Metro transitions to a pay-on-entry system, it is essential that front-line employees—particularly transit operators—are well-informed about the changes. Metro will coordinate communications among operations sections including Training, Base Operations, Service Quality, Transit Control Center and Link Control Center to ensure that emerging operational issues are addressed.

Metro will also ensure that adequate training is provided for transit operators and frontline staff so they can be effective sources of information for customers. This training will also help minimize fare disputes and alleviate employee job stress by providing reliable, easy-to-understand information.

### **Timeline**

The overall May-October timeline for communications, employee training, outreach and coordination is summarized in the table on the following page.

<b>Communications, Employee Training, Outreach, Coordination</b>	
<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Activities</b>
<b>May 2012</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Presentations to impacted stakeholders and transportation boards.</li> </ul>
<b>June - July 2012: Three months before implementation date</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Place notice in June service change materials</li> <li>▪ Kick off transit employee education</li> <li>▪ Send news release to publications with longer lead times (e.g. tourist magazines)</li> <li>▪ Partner with employers – particularly in downtown Seattle– to promote ORCA</li> <li>▪ Schedule presentations to downtown stakeholder groups on the changes for riders</li> </ul>
<b>August 2012: Six weeks before implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Send news release to local media</li> <li>▪ Give organizations “pay-as-you-enter” information to post or distribute <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CTR coordinators</li> <li>- Tourist/visitor organizations</li> <li>- Community organizations</li> <li>- Public libraries</li> <li>- Transit travel instructors</li> <li>- Social service organizations (include Regional Reduced Fare Permit information)</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Produce video to post online (consider multi-lingual versions)</li> <li>▪ Post new page on Metro Online – e.g. “pay-as-you-enter is coming”</li> <li>▪ Contact customers who require travel training/instruction</li> </ul>
<b>August/September 2012: Four weeks before implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Intensive communication with riders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- News conference/event</li> <li>- Provide information and graphics to media and blogs</li> <li>- Send Transit Alert to all route subscribers</li> <li>- Rider alerts and announcements on all coaches</li> <li>- Scroller slide on Metro Online pointing to “pay-as-you-enter is coming” page</li> <li>- Street teaming in downtown Seattle and major transit centers</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>September 2012</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Implement mitigation for disadvantaged communities</li> </ul>
<b>After implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Monitor customer fare payment behavior (via operations, service quality and customer service) and respond accordingly.</li> <li>▪ Measure customer satisfaction with the new policy change.</li> </ul>

### **Using public feedback**

A public comment period on the implementation plan was open from March 20-April 6, 2012. The public was invited to comment either online, by regular mail, by email, or by phone. In addition, Metro and its partner agencies hosted an open house on March 29 at which the public had an opportunity to ask questions about the transition plans and make comments. The open house also provided information on ORCA, employer programs, Reduced Regional Fare Permits, Access transportation, the current human services ticket program, and transportation options available to people with little or no income once the RFA ends.

Metro will consider comments submitted by the public and make adjustments to the implementation plan as appropriate.

The input gathered at this open house is also assisting Sound Transit in making a decision about operational changes to align with Metro and Community Transit changes in downtown Seattle.

## **Mitigating Impacts to Low-income Riders**

Among those who will be most affected by the elimination of the Ride Free Area and change to pay-on-entry are people with little or no income who use the free bus service to access essential services downtown.

Metro is committed to continuing to help people who depend on public transportation for mobility. Metro also complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and the “fair and just” principle of the King County Strategic Plan, which seeks to eliminate inequities and social injustices based on race, income, and neighborhood.

The following are strategies Metro is pursuing to assist those affected by the upcoming changes:

- Use Metro’s existing transportation assistance programs.
- Reach out to human services and health agencies.
- Work with the City of Seattle to determine what mitigation solutions might be put in place to assist people who cannot afford transit in downtown Seattle.

In addition, to achieve King County’s Strategic Plan goal to “provide opportunities for all communities and individuals to realize their full potential,” the County remains a regional human services provider and is responsible for the management of a broad array of programs. These include the coordination of mental health and substance abuse treatment and crisis response services; early intervention services for all infants and toddlers with developmental delays; services for low-income veterans and their families; employment and training programs for both youth and adults; and youth and family support programs. King County is also a strong partner in the regional effort to coordinate homeless housing and prevention funding and coordinates the work of the Committee to End Homelessness in King County.

While King County has experienced reductions in general fund support for human services in recent years, several new fund sources including the Veterans and Human Services Levy, the Mental Illness and Drug Dependency (MIDD) Sales Tax, document recording fees for housing and homelessness services, and several major grants for human services have generated new revenue. King County’s human services budget has grown and, in 2011, was over \$382 million.

### **Metro’s transportation assistance programs**

#### **Reduced Regional Fare Permit**

The Regional Reduced Fare Permit (RRFP) program entitles senior riders (age 65 or older), riders with a disability, and Medicare card holders to reduced fares on public transportation throughout the Puget Sound region. Permit holders are entitled to a 75-cent fare on all Metro’s regular transit services. They may also purchase monthly passes at a reduced rate of \$27 and load cash onto an ORCA RRFP card.

RRFP applicants must complete an application form and pay \$3 to purchase the permit. Seniors may apply by mail; people with disabilities must apply in person and have their disability certified by a health care professional.

### **King County Human Services Ticket Program**

King County's Human Services Ticket Program sells tickets at an 80 percent discount to human services agencies. The agencies distribute these tickets to their clients for travel to shelters, medical appointments, job training, food banks and other essential services. This program was established in 1993 when Seattle Housing and Resource Effort (SHARE) established a homeless shelter at the Aloha Inn, outside of walking distance from downtown.

The Human Services Department at the City of Seattle and the Department of Community and Human Services at King County determine the eligibility and the allocations for each agency. Social service agencies purchase tickets directly from Metro throughout the year, paying 20 percent of the cost of the tickets up to their annual allocation.

King County Code (Section 28.94.245) establishes a limit to the annual amount of Metro subsidy for the Human Services Ticket Program (\$1.9 million in 2012). This limit has been adjusted over the years in response to increased demand as well as fare increases. Metro provided over 1.1 million rides through this program in 2011.

### **Working with human services and health agencies**

In November 2011, the King County Executive's Office and Metro convened a subcommittee of representatives from key social and health service agencies to seek their advice about mitigation strategies. These agencies assist low-income people who use the RFA to travel to services in and around downtown Seattle.

This group includes Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness, Plymouth Housing Group, DESC, Evergreen Treatment Services, Pioneer Square Clinic, Real Change, Compass Housing Alliance, Housing Alliance, Catholic Community Services of Western Washington, and Millionaire Club. The committee also includes representatives from the City of Seattle and Seattle City Council.

Throughout the process, staff continued to work with the service agencies and the City of Seattle staff to develop options to mitigate the impacts of the elimination of the RFA to low- and no-income riders. In March 2012, the subcommittee met again with City of Seattle representatives to focus on transportation assistance.

### **Evaluating mitigation options**

Metro evaluated several options to address impacts to no- and low-income residents that may result from elimination of the RFA. This evaluation included:

- Study of travel behavior in the RFA.
- Review of human service ticket programs at transit agencies nationwide.
- Review of downtown Seattle circulator options and a donated van program, both of which would provide transportation options for those who cannot afford to pay a fare.

### **Travel behaviors in the Ride Free Area**

In December 2011, Metro commissioned a survey by Gilmore Research to study bus travel by low-income residents and human service agency (HSA) clientele in the Ride Free Area. More

than 1,100 interviews were completed at service agencies and residential facilities in downtown Seattle.

The study had the following objectives:

1. A better understanding of mobility needs, capabilities, and resources of these clients.
2. An estimate of RFA ridership by HSA clients residing in the RFA and of clients traveling to HSAs from outside the RFA.

This study provided valuable information on travel behaviors of low-income residents and human services clientele in the RFA. Key findings include:

- 56 percent of respondents at service providers live within the RFA.
- Almost 40 percent of HSA clients have a bus pass, and those who live inside the RFA are just as likely to have a bus pass as those who do not.
- A greater proportion of those who live inside the RFA report having a difficult time walking than those who live outside it.
- The average number of daily trips per resident taken entirely within the RFA is 2.63.
- On the day they took the survey, two out of three HSA clients reported taking a trip in the RFA to visit a service agency, on average taking 2.02 trips to service agencies each day.

Unfortunately, the results of this study overstated the number of daily trips taken solely within the RFA. When compared to the 2010 report on RFA ridership and revenue estimates (which included actual bus zone boarding counts), the December 2011 survey suggests that the number of boardings by HSA clients is equal to the total number of RFA boardings by all riders on all days. Given the RFA's historical use by more than just HSA clients, the results of estimated ridership from the survey are not considered reliable.

## **Mitigation Options**

### **Increase subsidy to Human Services Ticket Program**

Metro looked at what transit agencies around the nation do to assist low-income individuals or nonprofit organizations. Transit agencies sampled were Metro Transit in Minneapolis, San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (MUNI), TriMet of Portland, Los Angeles Metro Transit Authority, Kitsap Transit and Honolulu BUS.

These transit agencies typically offer one of three types of discounts:

- Reduced passes or tickets distributed directly to social service and non-profit agencies.
- Reduced passes or tickets distributed to individuals based on income eligibility.
- Fare subsidy coupons distributed to individuals based on income-eligibility.

Discounts to nonprofit and social service agencies ranged from 5 to 50 percent of the cost of a pass or ticket. Individuals whose eligibility is based on income typically received a 50 percent discount on passes.

Compared to the programs evaluated, King County Metro provides the largest discount to nonprofit agencies with its Human Services Ticket program, which offers an 80 percent discount to human services agencies. Expanding this program is one option to mitigate impacts on low-income residents and clients of human service agencies resulting from eliminating the RFA.

### **Provide donated vehicles**

A donated-vehicle program would provide vehicles to human services agencies and housing facilities to provide transportation to their clients. Vans retired from Metro's Vanpool or Vanshare fleet would be provided. A new vehicle, similar to those operated by the Community Access Transportation (CAT) and dial-a-ride transportation (DART) programs might also be provided. Human service agencies or housing facilities would operate these vans to transport their clients.

Metro could pay for the van maintenance costs, typically \$2,000 per year per van. Subsidies for operating costs would be on a case-by-case basis. With the donation of these vans, Metro forfeits \$6,000 worth of salvage value for each Vanpool or Vanshare vehicle. For a new vehicle, similar to those used by the CAT program, the purchase price would range from \$60,000 to \$65,000.

### **Downtown circulator**

Metro has developed two concepts to provide information on costs and benefits for discussion purposes to help the City of Seattle develop a downtown circulator. These options are:

- Third Avenue Metro circulator, operating via Third Avenue between South Jackson Street and Battery Street, using current Metro bus stops to pick up and drop off passengers in this corridor.
- Downtown circulator, as evaluated, would operate in a clockwise direction between Jackson Street and Battery Street on First Avenue, and travel east onto Battery Street back onto Third Avenue for a short segment. From Third Avenue, the circulator would travel east via Virginia Street to Boren Avenue, serving the Urban Rest Stop and eventually Harborview Medical Center at Jefferson Street. The circulator would loop back into the downtown core via Yesler Way and Washington Street.

The Third Avenue Metro circulator estimates include three or four 40-foot coaches, depending on the frequency desired. The annual operating cost per coach would be approximately \$230,000. The Third Avenue Metro circulator would also require the purchase of additional 40-foot coaches at the cost of \$600,000 each. With three coaches, service could be provided every 20 minutes.

The downtown circulator estimates include three or four 11- to 12-passenger vehicles operated by an outside contractor. Annual operating cost per vehicle would be \$150,000-\$180,000. Depending on the vehicle chosen, capital costs would range from \$60,000 to \$65,000 per vehicle. With three vehicles, service would be provided every 20 minutes.

<b>Mitigating Impacts to Low-income Riders – Mitigation Strategies</b>	
<b>Still under consideration</b>	<b>Increase Human Services Ticket Program</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase the subsidy available through the Human Services Ticket program.</li> </ul>
	<b>Donated vehicle program</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide donated vehicles to specific agencies as appropriate.</li> </ul>
	<b>Downtown circulator</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Help the City of Seattle develop a downtown circulator.</li> </ul>

The City of Seattle and King County are discussing the options for providing transportation assistance to low- and no-income riders. In the past, the City of Seattle has contributed \$400,000 to the operation of the RFA.