



COVID-19 Response and Recovery Report

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Letter from Metro's Interim General Manager

Here at the county named for Martin Luther King Jr., we were the first in the nation to be impacted by COVID-19. From the beginning, we began to see up close and personal who depends on public transportation as an essential service for maintaining and protecting life.

Even at the pandemic's highest points, Metro riders made over 100,000 trips every day. They relied on our services and frontline employees to get them to work and meet their daily needs. These riders disproportionately came from communities that are lower-income and more racially diverse than King County as a whole.

As our agency, county, and country grapple with what has emerged as a three-part crisis—COVID-19, our reckoning with racial justice, and the subsequent economic downturn—we are more aware than ever of how safety, equity, and sustainability intersect in life-or-death situations.

I am proud of the steps Metro took quickly in the early days of the pandemic to:

- ▶ Keep our services safe
- ▶ Care for our employees
- ▶ Adjust the service we provide
- ▶ Partner creatively
- ▶ Act as responsible financial stewards

As we plan for the recovery and rebuilding process, I am grateful we have already done a lot of good work to prepare for the journey we have ahead of us.

Before COVID, we laid the groundwork with our Mobility Framework, which will guide Metro to recover and rebuild our service, agency, and region. We articulated our vision for King County's future in Metro Connects and our Long Game. Now we need to



roll up our sleeves to build upon our foundation and actualize our vision. Internally and externally, we must emerge from this three-part crisis a more equitable and resilient agency.

Metro's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Report outlines our goals and provides a snapshot of the critical actions we've taken since March 2020. Moving forward, we will be values-driven and data-informed to focus on:

- ▶ Making our services safer than ever for employees and customers
- ▶ Better aligning our practices with our values, with equity at the forefront
- ▶ Putting essential riders at the heart of our recovery
- ▶ Becoming a more resilient organization
- ▶ Supporting a climate-friendly economic recovery

Public transit is at the heart of a successful recovery from the health and economic crises precipitated by COVID-19. By providing increased mobility to neighborhoods and populations that have been historically underserved, Metro can do our part to address racial inequities and help to improve the quality of life for all in King County.

As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." During this time of significant change and upheaval, there too will be tremendous opportunity. As you read through this report, take a moment to think about the unique role you have played during this pivotal moment in history.

Let us all continue moving forward together; the region is counting on us, and we are the region.

I appreciate you,
Terry White, Interim General Manager



King County Metro's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Report

King County Metro's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Report is our first comprehensive assessment of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our community of King County, our customers, and our employees. It explains the steps we have taken since the first days of the pandemic to:



keep our services safe



care for our employees



adjust the service we provide



partner creatively



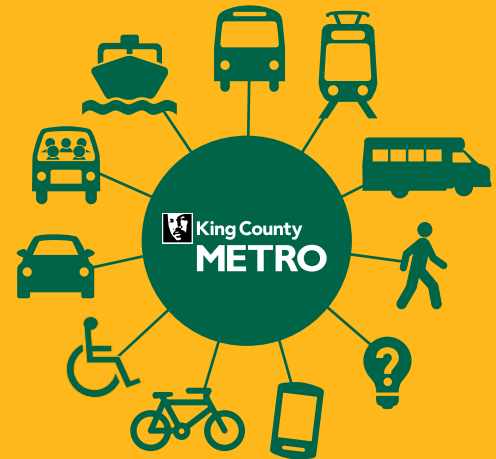
act as responsible financial stewards

This document lays out a framework for both initial actions and long-term strategies we are preparing for post-COVID-19 recovery. We will report on our progress as the impacts of COVID-19 continue to unfold and as we map out our steps to rebuild and recover with transit at the heart of a successful future for King County. Restoration of suspended service is one of the core actions associated with Metro's recovery. This report provides the proposed criteria for restoring suspended bus service. Process and timing of how the criteria will be used to resume service will be developed in the coming months. The plan has been put together by staff teams at King County Metro, with input from employees at all levels. It also reflects what we've heard since the onset of the pandemic from our customers, regional transit partners, community organizations, employers, jurisdictions, and elected officials throughout King County. Our union partnerships have also sustained us during this unprecedented time. The onset of COVID-19 has required us to respond nimbly as we've made adjustments to our operations on almost a daily basis.

Introduction

King County Metro

King County Metro is the largest public transportation agency in the Puget Sound region, delivering more than 130 million rides per year through a variety of mobility options, including fixed-route services (bus, rail, streetcar, and water taxi), contracted services (Dial-A-Ride Transit and Access paratransit service), and shared and connected services (Vanpool, Vanshare, Rideshare, and Community Access Transportation). Metro was recognized as the number one transit agency in North America in 2018 by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA).



Mobility is a human right. For Metro, mobility means the ability to get where you need to go, when you need to—safely, equitably, and sustainably.

Metro’s mission is to provide the best possible public transportation services to improve regional mobility and quality of life in King County.



An Evolving Crisis

Our region was the first in the nation to be impacted by COVID-19, after the positive diagnosis of a community member in February 2020. Since then, the public health, economic, and racial disparity crises caused or worsened by COVID-19 have continued to unfold, and their impact on transportation in King County continues to evolve. We are closely monitoring data and trends showing the impacts of COVID-19 in the following areas.

Community Impacts

The pandemic has had immediate and profound impacts on key economic, social, and overall community health indicators in King County.¹

UNEMPLOYMENT

458,500+

new unemployment claims filed by King County residents from March 1–August 1, 2020

FOOD INSECURITY

17,200

more King County households received Basic Food assistance in July than January 2020—a 17.5% increase

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

22%

increase in calls to behavioral health crisis lines in June 2020 compared to 2019

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

16%

increase in domestic violence calls to Seattle Police from January–April 2020 compared to 2019

TRAFFIC

19%

decrease in local highway traffic in August 2020 compared to 2019

¹ Public Health – Seattle & King County COVID-19 Data Dashboards; accessed August 20, 2020; <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19/data/impacts.aspx>

Public Health Impacts of COVID-19

King County was home to the United States' first confirmed case of COVID-19. As of September 25, 2020, there were 21,803 confirmed cases in the county, which translates into an overall rate of 51 cases per 100,000 residents for the last 14 days. In King County, COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting communities of color.²

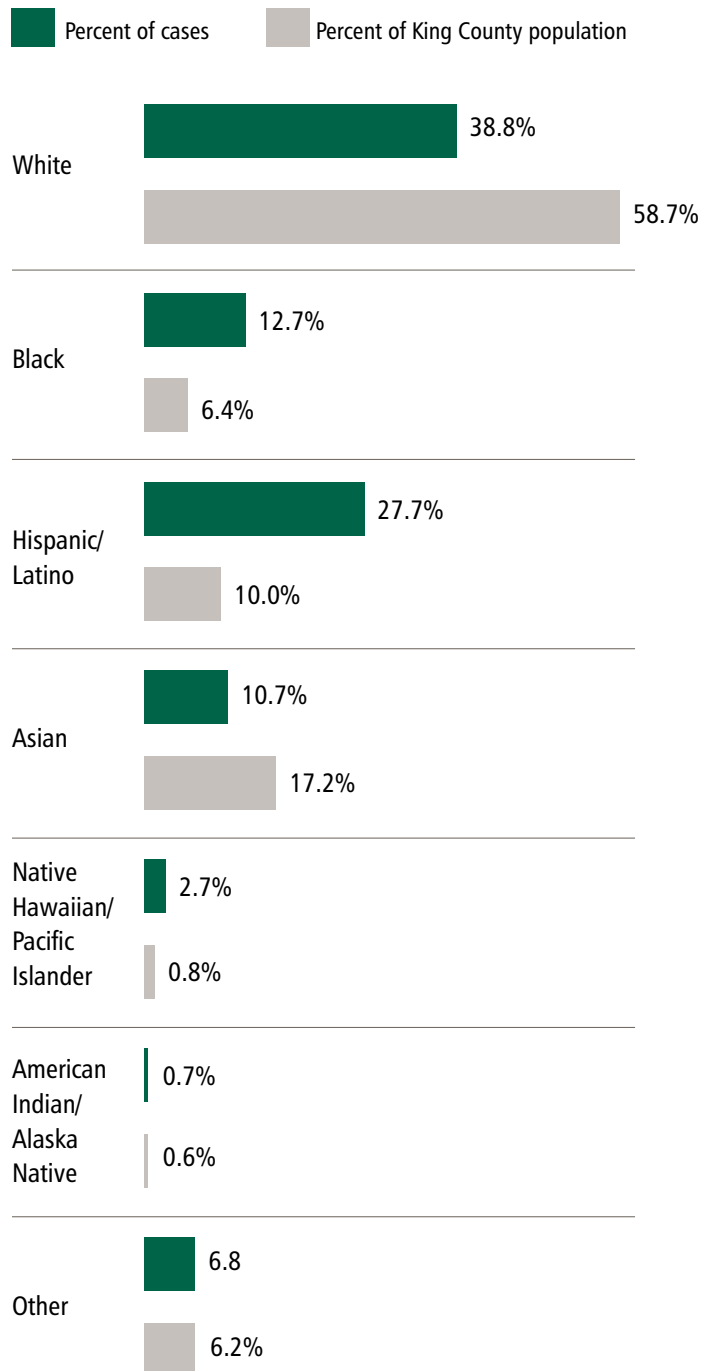
King County Metro Budget Impacts

Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Metro faced a shortfall of \$1B over 10 years that needed to be addressed in the development of the 2021–2022 budget. Revenue from sales tax and fares will be significantly impacted by current COVID-19 conditions and a projected, ongoing recession as a result of the pandemic. In addition, the Seattle Transportation Benefit District currently funds 10% of Metro service, and it will expire in December of 2020. The Seattle City Council has placed a new transportation benefit district measure on the ballot in November of this year. If approved, the new measure would fund approximately 5% of Metro service.

Metro is using CARES Act funding (~\$243M) and financial management policies with designated fund reserves to continue operating service for essential trips throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. But the reduced revenue forecasts have now resulted in a \$2B revenue gap over 10 years. Plans to address the budget gap include:

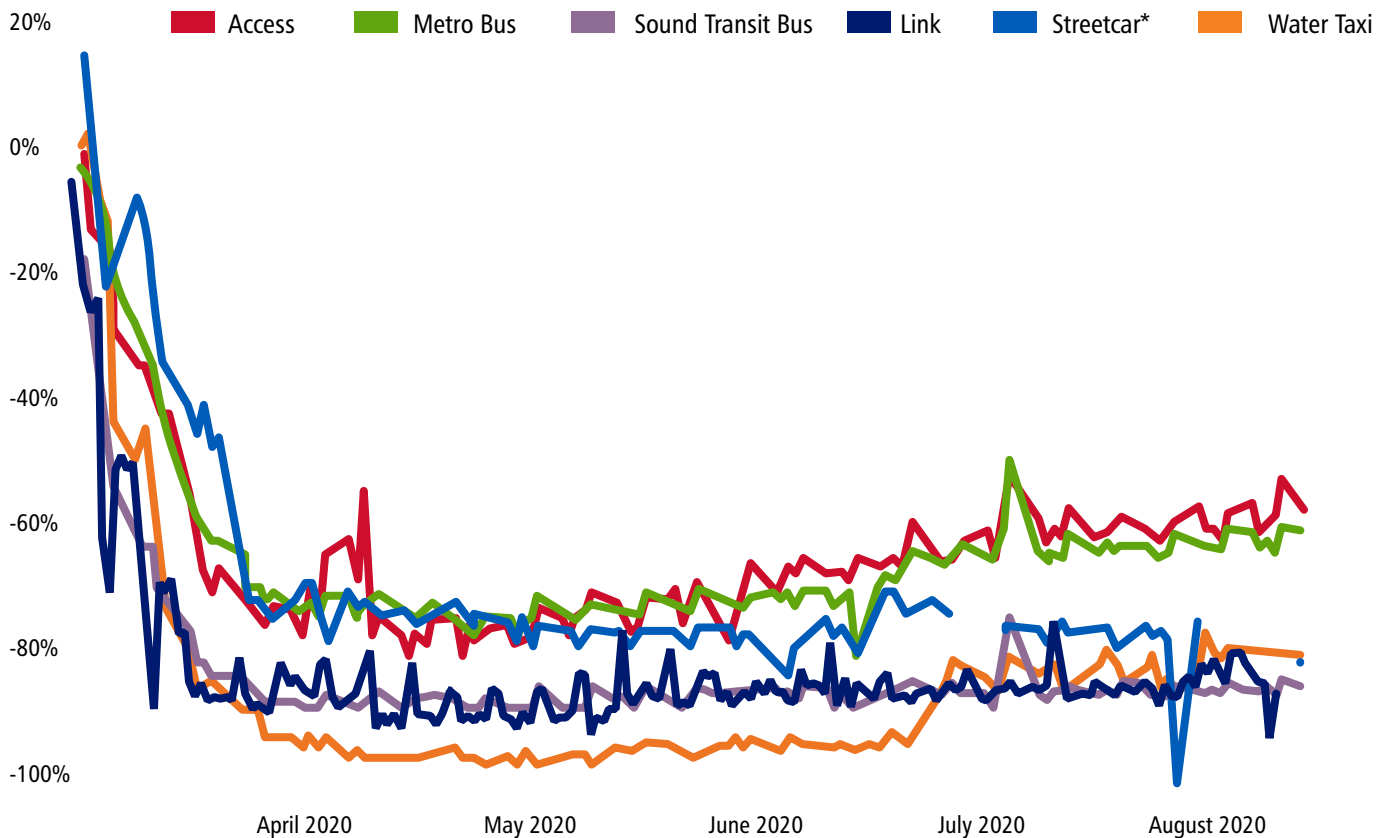
- ▶ reductions in planned service expansion
- ▶ scaling back capital investments so that transit capacity matches service delivery
- ▶ changes to reduce the cost of delivering service
- ▶ potential long-term service reductions and restructuring
- ▶ continuing to pursue efficiency and modernization in our service delivery

COVID-19 cases among King County residents by race/ethnicity³



2 & 3 Public Health – Seattle & King County COVID-19 Data Dashboards; accessed August 20, 2020; <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19/data/race-ethnicity.aspx>

Percentage change in daily boarding over the same period in 2019



*Due to data collection equipment error, streetcar ridership data is not available for portions of July and August 2020.

Demand for Metro Services

Beginning in mid-March, demand for Metro mobility service of all types fell sharply as residents heeded direction from elected leaders and public health officials to, “Stay Home, Stay Healthy,” and employers throughout the region asked employees who were able to do so to work from home. The chart above shows the change in ridership year over year, comparing 2019 for the range of mobility services between March and July of 2020. It includes Metro fixed-route bus, Sound Transit Express Bus, Link light rail, Streetcar, and Water Taxi.

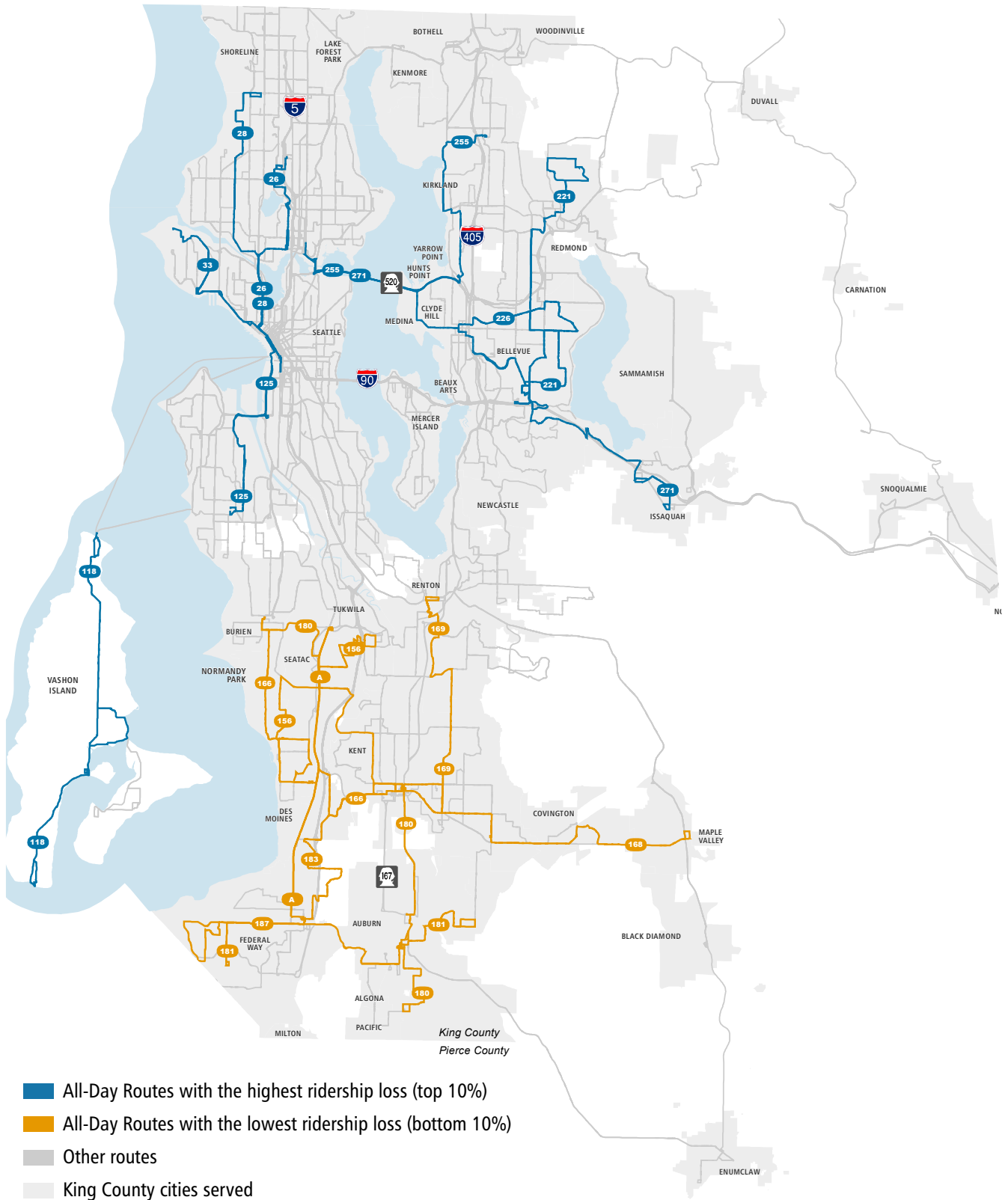
Below, we’ve briefly outlined the recovery phase changes for each mode, including Metro’s Access paratransit, Vanpool, and Vanshare services.

Metro Fixed-route Bus and Sound Transit Express Bus

Due to reduced ridership demand and a desire to maintain a resilient workforce, Metro reduced service across its fixed-route network three times between March 23 and April 20, 2020.

The following map shows the routes with the most and least ridership loss during the pandemic, and is consistent with known geographical inequities in King County. Essential workers, and people who depend on public transportation for their essential trips, are concentrated in areas with high percentages of people of color and low-income residents.

All-day routes with highest and lowest ridership loss: week of June 22, 2020



As shown on the map – and throughout the pandemic to date – many routes maintained relatively strong ridership. After capacity limits were set to facilitate physical distancing, and to protect operators and customers, some trips were added back to provide the greatest amount of capacity possible, and to avoid passing waiting customers. In June, following Governor Inslee’s issuance of Phase 2 recovery for King County, ridership gradually began to rise. On June 22 Metro added back some service, lifting certain service suspensions across the county.

Additional adjustments to service levels were made on September 18, 2020 as part of Metro’s fall/September service change. The service change reset service levels to be more consistent with observed ridership levels and available resources, but Metro is also positioning itself to supplement this service if new and increased patterns in ridership emerge.

Light Rail and Streetcar

King County Metro operates the Link light rail and Seattle Streetcar under contract for Sound Transit and the City of Seattle respectively. Ridership for these services has followed a similar trajectory to other Metro mobility services during recovery.

Link ridership dropped to 90% below pre-COVID levels, recently climbing to 83% of normal for weekdays. As ridership declined and staffing capacity constraints increased, service was reduced. Link trains decreased frequencies to as low as every 30 minutes. Currently, Link runs every 8 minutes during peak commute times, every 15 minutes during the midday, and every 30 minutes after 9 p.m. and on weekends.

Seattle Streetcar’s ridership dropped by 50% by mid-March, and on March 23 service reduction on the First Hill line and full suspension of the South Lake Union line resulted in a 75% decrease in ridership for the entire COVID period thus far. In mid-September, service increased on the First Hill Seattle Streetcar line, and the South Lake Union line re-opened.





King County Water Taxi

Water Taxi ridership has dropped 90% compared to pre-COVID levels. The daily ridership is increasing slightly week over week as more customers slowly return to commuting.

Demand for Water Taxi services will be dependent on several factors. As commuter trips increase on all modes, the Water Taxi demand is likely to also go up on both the Vashon and West Seattle routes. Due to the West Seattle Bridge closure, the Water Taxi will also be a fast way to access downtown with a quick eight minute crossing.

Vanpool and Vanshare

Ridership for King County Metro's Commuter Van program has seen a sharp decline in participation due to COVID. While 94% of groups have retained their vans, due largely to fare suspension and reduced participant requirements during the pandemic, the vast majority of employers/employees who normally vanpool are currently telecommuting, resulting in a 90% decline of ridership beginning in April. Post-pandemic demand for Vanpool will likely decline as employers downsize their workforce and office space, and encourage more telecommuting and flexible work schedules for remaining staff. Traditional Vanpool requires a group of five or more participants traveling to and from the same work location at the same time. The Vanpool program will need to adopt a more flexible model to meet changing customer requirements, and seek out new markets to regrow participation.



Access

Trends showed a drop in Access ridership of 70% during the initial phases of COVID-19, but with the reopening of King County, there was an upward trend in May-August, resulting in ridership at about 50% of pre-COVID levels. Additionally, since March, Access has assisted customers with disabilities who have emergent transportation needs but are not yet certified for the service. Access is also currently providing food deliveries to our clients and others in the community. By providing food access to our riders, there is less of a need to be transported for grocery visits and food access. Most riders are currently using the service for medical appointments and getting to work.

Flexible Services

Via to Transit was temporarily suspended at the end of March. Service resumed in a particular reduced service area without shared rides at the end of June. Ridership has slowly increased since then to an average of 156 daily rides as of August 10—down 80% from the previous year, or 72% when just comparing the same service areas.

Metro's Community Van program limited trips to private rides/essential trips only in response to the COVID outbreak, while working to adapt the service for general public trips long term. Across all service areas, the program experienced a decline of over 80% of its trips in April. May and June experienced a service uptick, due primarily to an innovative partnership with ATU drivers on Vashon who supported additional trips to mitigate loss of Vashon fixed route service. Once bus service resumed on the island in July, the service across all jurisdictions where Community Vans are deployed experienced a 90% decline in rides compared to July 2019.



Impacts to our Employees

Supporting Health

From the beginning of this pandemic, we've strongly recommended that employees who are at higher risk for infection stay home to protect their health. King County also strengthened paid leave policies, provided leave to those in need, and worked with our labor partners to provide leave above the federal leave programs initiated in the spring. Since the start of the pandemic, over half of Metro's employees utilized COVID-related leave programs (58% in Operations divisions and 52% overall). These programs, combined with our existing benefits, allowed those who were high-risk, ill, concerned about being ill, or caring for loved ones to stay home and quarantine. Metro worked closely with Public Health to support contact tracing for those who reported positive tests, in order to help proactively slow the spread of coronavirus.

Well-being

COVID-19 has impacted far more than the physical health of our employees. Particularly for our frontline employees, the pandemic has taken a huge toll on overall well-being. Working on our front lines brings intense pressure. That pressure has been compounded by events in August of this year, when Metro was forced to lay off 200 part-time operators due to budget shortfalls caused by the pandemic. These laid off colleagues are being connected with the new King County Health Ambassador program: a new program available to King County employees whose jobs will be or have been eliminated due to COVID-caused conditions. These colleagues are also eligible for King County's Priority Placement Program: an assistance program for employees facing layoffs. Seventy-five employees have been placed as of September.

“The biggest challenge working through the pandemic is being on top of things to ensure that everyone is safe. I have to keep my guard up, wear proper PPE, always wear my mask and gloves...It’s scary, but I understand that what I do not only keeps them safe, it keeps me safe, it keeps my family safe.”

Metro has also taken initiative in its recruiting efforts by prioritizing employees that have Metro experience and assigning recruiters to help these colleagues with their job searches.

While most of our employees do not have the option of working from home, over 800 employees have been teleworking since March of this year, managing an abrupt transition to a new, remote work style.

And many of our employees are facing difficult societal pressures. Like other families across America, they are juggling stressful tasks like safely caring for loved ones at high risk of contracting the virus and searching for childcare and/or other caregiving support when schools and care facilities are either closed or operating differently.

In addition to the inequitable impacts of COVID-19, another factor influencing our employees’ wellbeing—51.1% of whom are people of color as compared to 41.4% in King County as a whole—has been the painful, chronic, and high profile deaths of Black and Brown people at the hands of law enforcement in communities around the country. In employee meetings and town halls, team members frequently shared that the resulting national reckoning with systemic racial injustice weighs on them.





Bridget Brown, Facilities COVID Sanitation Team

Bridget Brown has been with Metro since 2018. She heads the Facilities COVID Sanitation Team.

“The biggest challenge working through the pandemic is being on top of things to ensure that everyone is safe. I have to keep my guard up, wear proper PPE, always wear my mask and gloves. I was working in the transit tunnel at the start of the pandemic, and a lot of riders would come and thank me for protecting them by keeping things sanitized—they understand that I’m out there putting myself on the line. It’s scary, but I understand that what I do not only keeps them safe, it keeps me safe, it keeps my family safe.”

Ryan Abin, Lead Utility Laborer

Ryan Abin has been with Metro since 2015 and is a Lead Utility Laborer with the Transit Facilities Division. Ryan’s team is responsible for pressure washing and removing debris from bus shelters.



“The biggest change for me during this pandemic is how we now interact with our colleagues at work. We now heavily rely on technology to connect us to each other and when we are at work, having to see each other with face masks and not being able to shake hands when greeting each other has been weird. Our line of work can be both physically demanding, but also mentally draining. I find myself engaging more with people and their personal lives—sometimes I just sit and listen. It’s important for me that work and personal lives are somewhat balanced.

Customers see a bus stop. They see a seat, shelter from the rain, shade from the sun. What they don’t realize is their shelter was also a bed for an individual for the whole evening. We are equipped and prepared for various situations, and we can make that all disappear in 7 minutes. A customer wakes up, gets ready for work and waits at a bus stop. We take pride of being part of their first impressions of Metro.”



John Villagomez, Lead Rail Service Worker

John Villagomez is an 11-year veteran with Metro and is the Graveyard Shift Lead Rail Service Worker for Link light rail. His team is responsible for the daily cleaning, detail cleaning, and disinfection of the light rail vehicles for daily service.

“We lean on the side of caution when it comes to cleaning; if there’s any doubt, we clean it. The biggest challenges we face are a noisy work environment and maintaining spatial awareness. Facial coverings make communication, even at less than 6 feet, difficult. Clarification of tasks and instructions have become paramount when considering life safety and health in the workplace.

We must also maintain constant awareness of the surfaces we work in and around, paying particular attention to the surfaces we come in contact with—we are never to enter a train without gloves, at a minimum. This leads to more glove changes per shift and more handwashing in between glove changes. I also shower before I leave work and encourage my subordinates to do the same.”

Bernard Burney, Lead Station Custodian

Bernard Burney has been with Metro for 7 years. The team he leads is responsible for the cleanup and maintenance of the 16 stations on Link light rail.

“Wearing masks has been the biggest change for me. You not only need to wear one, but you need to ensure that other staff are wearing them, as well as hoping that passengers are wearing them. When you combine that with social distancing, it can become a challenge. But nobody wants to take this home to their family. The reduction of passengers means an increase of people using the stations as a place to stay. We are aware of this and careful in how we approach cleaning. It’s something that most passengers seem to understand when they see us as they get off the train.”





Renita Wright, Trolley Operator

Renita Wright is a Trolley Operator out of Metro's Atlantic Base. An operator with close to two decades of experience, Renita has been driving for Metro for over 3 years.

"I consider driving a customer service business, so the biggest challenge for me has been the reduction in interaction between drivers and passengers. I look forward to talking with my riders, but to protect ourselves and our passengers, we have to hide our smiles behind our masks.

While we're losing some of the contact we have with passengers, I have seen a growth in the bonds between operators. We understand the challenges we face and we're supporting each other, even if it's just making recommendations on where to find disinfectant supplies or passing along information from management that they may not be aware of."

Deb Waters, Rail Service Worker—Streetcar

Deb Waters, who is responsible for the detailing and deep cleaning of the trains for both the First Hill and South Lake Union lines, is in her 13th year of working for Metro.

"It's been difficult dealing with the isolation during the pandemic— isolation not just from passengers, but from my coworkers. We tend to be working on the cleaning and inspection of the trains at the same time and we've become good at dancing around each other, but we don't speak. It's mostly a nod of the head because we are very careful in our steps to prevent the spread of the virus.

Every day we're focused on protecting our operators and our passengers. Even before I start my regular cleaning routine, we now decontaminate the trains every day, focusing on touchpoints. The operator cabs are wiped down with alcohol after every trip. I think our passengers are getting a terrific bargain; they can feel confident in knowing the streetcar they're on is thoroughly cleaned and decontaminated every day because we take the hours needed to get it done."





Frank Dwinnell, Marine Information Agent

Frank Dwinnell works as a Marine Information Agent and is also a trained deckhand who fills in on the vessels when needed. He's been with Metro for over a year.

"Current capacity levels on our vessels impact every aspect of my job. We have seen a decrease in the number of people on our boats, specifically the vessel to Kitsap County. This has allowed us to keep social distancing at every point in the process—from when they get in line to when they board the vessel. We've taken advantage of the smaller capacity to exercise extreme social distancing, sometimes up to 30 feet between vessel staff and passengers.

The capacity levels are also the thing some people don't understand about the pandemic. Captains and crews have measured out spacing with tape measures and occasionally that has meant people not being able to board a vessel because we have reached capacity. They wonder why we have selected such an "arbitrary" number and "if we could fudge it for this run." I can appreciate why they ask—they're just trying to get home—but there's a reason behind the metrics. We want to keep everyone safe."



Stephanie Anderson, Customer Service

Stephanie Anderson has been part of Metro's Customer Service team since April 2019.

"My biggest challenge has been finding solutions and helping customers on the fly. There have been a lot of changes beyond COVID, and I'm focused on adapting to the changes and helping our customers adapt as they look for help with the questions. Naturally, we have seen reduced call volume, which is allowing me to spend more time with those customers that call us. They're calling because they have a question about their service or an issue they need help with. It's great to have a little extra time to establish that human to human contact as I help the with what they need. The extra time is also good because people do have questions about the steps Metro is taking to help keep them safe."



We're Listening: What our Customers, Employees, and Community Are Saying

To best serve our region during the pandemic, Metro has heard from and engaged with a diverse sampling of the community, including:

- ▶ Metro employees
- ▶ customers, both current and potential
- ▶ businesses
- ▶ elected officials
- ▶ various jurisdictions
- ▶ community partners representing vulnerable, priority populations

Feedback from these different audiences largely focused on several key themes listed in the chart below. While different audiences have had strong opinions about each topic, their perspectives have differed based on their experiences (especially differing between customers and employees). We have also consulted with the Metro Transportation Equity Cabinet and the Transit Advisory Commission about what they envision, hope, and fear in a post-COVID mobility future.

Audience Feedback: March–August 2020

Theme	Key Take Away
Employee concerns during COVID	The top concerns from employees are around HR/leave policies, the struggle to balance changed caregiving responsibilities, internal communication, personal safety, and PPE. Frontline staff are concerned about safety and want actions that will protect them to be implemented quickly and transparently, and they want an opportunity to weigh in on those decisions.
Cleanliness, health, and safety	Cleanliness, and communicating specifically about what Metro is doing to clean and keep the service safe for both riders and employees, is critical for riders and employees to feel safe on board Metro and in the workplace. Riders also reported a lack of knowledge about Metro’s COVID-19 response in the early weeks of the pandemic, along with a global concern about entering public spaces such as transit vehicles.
Riders with disabilities	Riders with disabilities are facing greater challenges riding transit due to some of the measures taken to address COVID-19, including reduced service and reduced capacity. Such changes have resulted in more complaints from riders with disabilities who have been passed by full buses.
Masks	Mask usage and enforcement remains top-of-mind for both customers and employees. Both customers and employees would like to see each other wearing masks more often, and many customers and employees want to see greater enforcement of the mask policy on board the bus and in the workplace. Elected officials are highly interested in this topic as well.
Physical distancing, crowding, and pass-ups	Riders of all modes want to see other passengers riding right, by keeping their distance and avoiding the boarding of a vehicle that appears to be over the physical distancing capacity limits. Bus riders are also concerned about being passed up by buses with the “Coach Full” sign.
Service and communications around service	Riders are concerned about the reliability of service, given the reduced schedules and capacity limits which have impacted their confidence in the bus. Having materials about the reduced schedule in multiple languages simultaneously was critical to ensuring that communities could stay informed about schedule changes.

See Appendix A COVID-19 Response and Recovery Report: Community and Employee Engagement Summary for more detail on what we’ve heard.

Response and Recovery Planning

In the early days of the COVID-19 crisis, Metro took quick action to protect the health and safety of our employees and customers, and to change our services in a variety of ways to meet evolving needs. At the same time, we started looking ahead to the post-COVID future, preparing to rebuild and recover.

Core Values

Metro's three core values guide us as we respond to the pandemic and prepare for recovery:



SAFETY

Safety is Metro's top priority. King County was the first community in the U.S. to experience COVID-19, and Metro has led the way across the nation to make transit as safe as possible. Our focus remains on providing a safe, equitable, and sustainable network that allows our region to respond and to recover.



EQUITY

King County's communities and geography are diverse, so we continue to build and improve a mobility network that connects people to opportunities and knits together our growing communities. We are committed to eliminating disparities by race and place, and prioritizing service where the needs are greatest.



SUSTAINABILITY

At Metro, sustainability means meeting the needs of today without compromising the abilities and needs of future generations. We are addressing the climate crisis. By reducing car trips and electrifying our fleet, we reduce climate pollution and improve public health. We are committed to meeting the mobility needs of our region.



Our Vision for Recovery

Public transit will be at the heart of a successful recovery from the health, economic, and racial inequity crises precipitated or worsened by COVID-19. Metro will emerge from this three-part crisis a stronger and more resilient agency that supports our community's rebuild, honors our employees' contributions, and is grounded in our values of safety, equity, and sustainability.

Goals for Recovery

King County Metro will emerge stronger from the COVID crisis by:



Making our services safer than ever for employees and customers

We're working to remain a national leader in the development of safety practices by continuing to provide safe transit service for our customers and employees, and carefully updating our practices to reflect the latest health guidelines. In a climate where people are wary of entering public spaces, we will rebuild public trust in transit by demonstrating our commitment to safety and communicating clearly about the steps we are taking.



Better aligning our practices with our values, with equity at the forefront

The COVID-19 crisis has caused us to rapidly reshape many of our business practices. At the same time, our agency's work to eliminate institutional racism—alongside a national reckoning with racial injustice—has reinforced our focus on becoming a more just and equitable organization. Underpinning it all, we retain an unwavering commitment to our core values of safety, equity, and sustainability. When combined, these three factors give us an opportunity to re-evaluate systems that may not be effective for our employees, our riders, and the communities we serve. We will leverage this chance to rebuild our systems and structures in better alignment with our core values and pointed to the future mapped out for us in Metro Connects, our Strategic Plan, and the Mobility Framework.



Putting our essential riders at the heart of our recovery

Even at the peak of the crisis, Metro riders made one quarter of pre-COVID daily trips (over 100,000 trips every day). They continued to rely on our services and our frontline employees to get them to their essential jobs and to meet their essential daily needs. These riders disproportionately came from communities that are lower income and more racially diverse than King County as a whole. While we eagerly invite all customers back to our services, we will start the recovery focused on creating a better system for the riders who have needed transit the most during the crisis, as they are likely to most depend on mobility services when the pandemic ends.



Becoming a more resilient organization

We will learn from and improve on the practices we've developed in the initial stages of the crisis response. We aim to become an organization that is better able to adapt and adjust to changing environments, while still remaining focused on our core mission. Building resilience, focus, and adaptability into our practices will ensure we can continue to serve our customers, partners, and community well, even in times of rapid change.



Support a thriving economy and address the climate crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a major public health and economic crisis for our region. Despite current challenges, this is not a time to put climate action on hold; both COVID-19 and climate change show us that you cannot wait to take action until you see the impact. Preparing and acting urgently is important, and there is a critical role for local government leadership. Metro is committed to build back better, to maximize our efficient delivery of mobility services, giving transit priority on our roads, and transitioning to low-carbon infrastructure in our fleets and facilities. Making every dollar count will keep the region moving.



Organizing for Response and Recovery

As our agency begins the process of recovering and rebuilding from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have created Metro's Recovery Planning Team (RPT) and Task Forces. Representatives from across the department have worked together to address complex, cross-divisional issues and ensure effective transition to implementation teams at the division level.

Our recovery efforts align with the Governor's Safe Start Washington plan and may proceed after the state plan concludes, as we will continue to manage economic and social transition resulting from COVID-19.

Four task forces with cross-divisional membership have been created to make recommendations for how we adjust our business operations. Membership in the task forces was also assigned with a goal of sharing power within the organization. The goal is to develop short- and mid-term changes focused on the categories of:

- ▶ Work & Health
- ▶ Work Place Recovery Training & Employee Engagement
- ▶ Mobility Services
- ▶ Customer Experience

The RPT and its Task Forces have worked together to develop the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Report for Metro and to serve as the connection point for internal and external input, including guidance from Metro's senior leadership.

Planning for Multiple Futures

COVID-19 Virus Scenarios

King County Metro has developed response and recovery steps for a range of potential scenarios for the months and years ahead. Working with Seattle–King County Public Health and using the four phases outlined in the Safe Start Washington Phased Reopening Plan, we mapped out four scenarios for the potential progression of the pandemic. Ultimately, we chose Scenarios 1 and 2 as our most likely future experience. At the same time, we prioritized actions that would have utility in all scenarios, given the uncertainty of the pandemic’s progression.

- ▶ Scenario 0: Early crisis, steady lowering of virus transmission through careful adherence to public health guidance, the creation and distribution of a vaccine which mitigates the virus, and final recovery
- ▶ Scenario 1: Early crisis, the initial recovery, a second wave, the creation and distribution of a vaccine which mitigates the virus, and final recovery
- ▶ Scenario 2: Early crisis, a sustained infection rate and plateau with no distinct decline and small spikes, a vaccine is created and distributed, and final recovery
- ▶ Scenario 3: Early crisis, a sustained infection rate and plateau with no distinct decline and small spikes, no vaccine is identified making ongoing protective measures such as face coverings and social distancing necessary well into the future

Long-term Recovery Stages

Metro’s recovery planning does not take place in a vacuum. It has informed and been informed by several concurrent planning and budgeting activities. These activities include a comprehensive update to three key Metro policy documents (our Strategic Plan, Metro Connects, and Service Guidelines) expected to be transmitted to King County Council for adoption in fall 2021, and the development of our 2021–2022 bi-annual budget. As we look ahead to the next few years, we see three likely stages in the process of long-term recovery:

- ▶ crisis response and recovery planning
- ▶ stabilization and recovery
- ▶ recovered future



King County Metro Long-term Recovery Stages

	Crisis Response and Recovery Planning	Stabilization and Recovery	Recovered Future
	Planning Activities		
Response and Recovery Planning	Response	Planning	Implementation
Policy Updates	Planning		Implementation
	What's Happening		
Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Use of COVID-required cleaning and disinfecting procedures ▶ Use of PPE and other engineered interventions ▶ Reduced capacity on transit vehicles ▶ Health screening implementation ▶ Elimination or reduction of in-person employee gatherings/meetings ▶ Physical distancing required and enforced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Resumption of standard cleaning and disinfecting procedures ▶ Phased-out use of PPE; removal of engineered interventions that don't have broader use ▶ Health monitoring systems retired ▶ Gradual increase in capacity on transit vehicles ▶ Resumption of in-person employee meetings/gatherings ▶ Physical distancing requirements relaxed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Resumption of standard operations and work practices
Workplace and Employee Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Workforce availability fluctuation due to absenteeism; COVID-related leaves ▶ Rapid workforce size reduction due to layoffs, voluntary separation program, and attrition ▶ Rapid introduction of new procedures and policies to keep employees safe and healthy ▶ Low or fluctuating morale due to pace of change and layoffs ▶ Mandatory telecommuting where possible and planning for longer-term approach to workspace and telecommute policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Absenteeism stabilized; no staff limitations due to COVID ▶ Workforce sized for new service profile; limited-to-no layoffs ▶ Transition to longer-term approach to workspace and telecommute policies ▶ Equitable communication tools, policies, and procedures in place to keep employees safe and healthy ▶ Morale stabilizes and climbs as pace of change for employees slows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Equitable policies and procedures in place to keep employees safe and healthy ▶ Employee engagement improves ▶ Continued equitable employee health/wellness and employee development programming ▶ Morale steady, impacted by routine events
Customer Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Rapid introduction of new requirements and experiences for customers ▶ Rapid introduction of new communication tools and techniques and COVID-related marketing efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Pace of change for customer experience stabilizes ▶ All COVID-specific customer requirements (mask wearing, limited capacity, etc.) phased out ▶ Customer safety and information improvements continue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Longer-term improvements to customer information and experience implemented, as funding allows
Mobility Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Rapid moves between different service profiles, driven by absenteeism and Safe Start Washington phases ▶ Priorities for service are guided by regular monitoring of metrics to measure transit demand, such as crowding, ridership, and the status of workplace recovery ▶ Some service suspended due to COVID-19 impacts ▶ Supplemental service between service changes in place to help alleviate crowding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Service changes at routine service change times in spring and fall are key points to assess recovery and add back service as needed ▶ Priorities for service guided by updated policy documents and regular monitoring of metrics to measure transit demand, such as crowding, ridership, and the status of workplace recovery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Scenarios without a response to regional funding needs necessitate large-scale Metro service cuts



Recovery Planning Approach

Principles

The following principles are shaping our approach to recovery planning:

- ▶ Begin thoughtful planning to rebuild now, even as we are still responding to the crisis
- ▶ Center our agency values for equity and racial justice in the recovery planning process, decision-making, and final plan
- ▶ Structure the recovery planning process to adapt to emerging issues and a rapidly evolving recovery context
- ▶ Build the recovery by phases with an ability to flexibly expand, adjust, and contract
- ▶ Ensure transparency by identifying clear milestones for change
- ▶ Leverage our stakeholder and jurisdictional partner relationships to build a coordinated, efficient recovery model
- ▶ Fit all recommendations within our budget reality

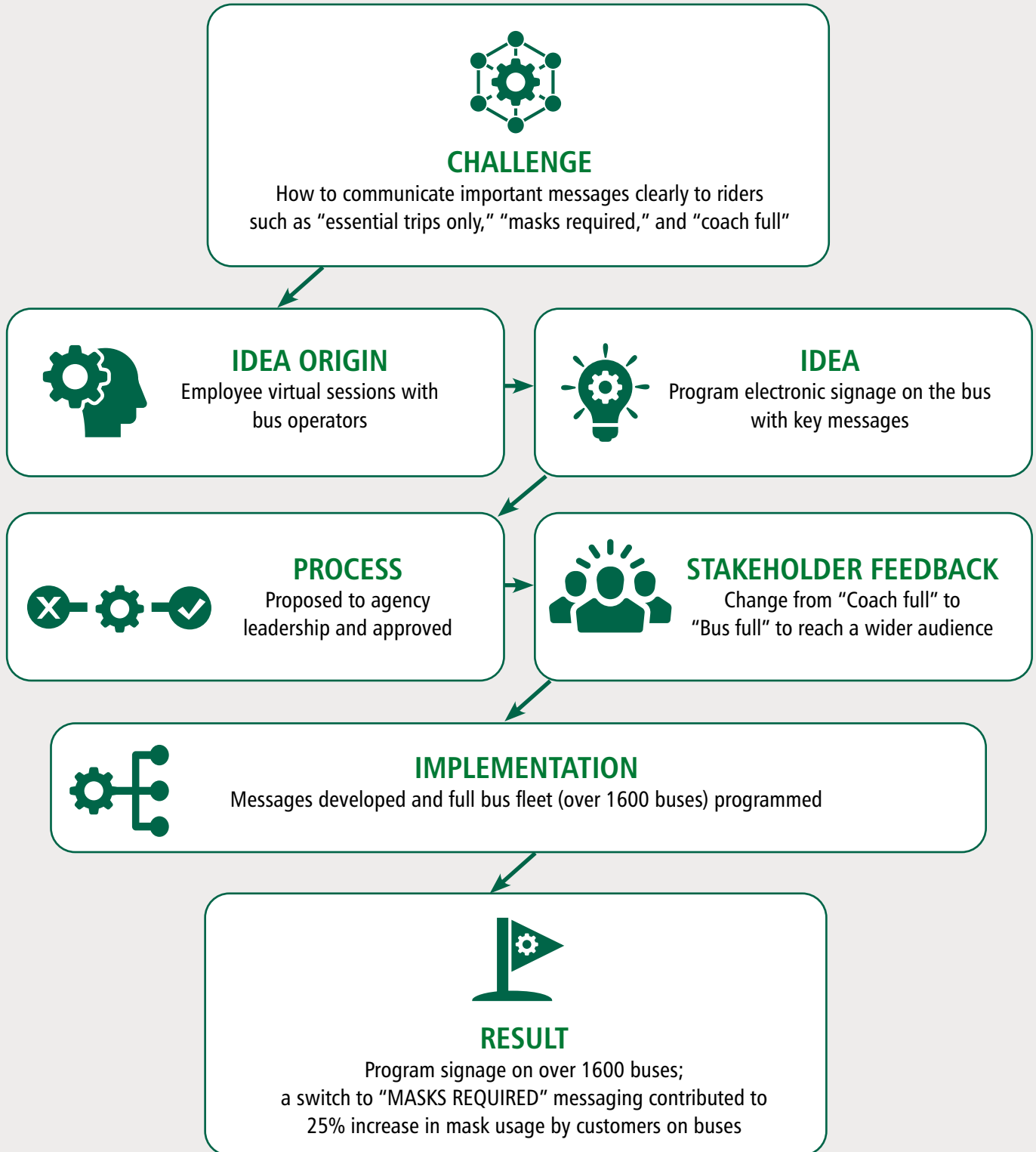
Priorities

Metro used the following criteria to identify and prioritize our response actions and recovery recommendations:

1. The action is achievable
 - ▶ Within 12–18 months (by the end of 2021)
 - ▶ Without new funding
2. The action doesn't introduce unacceptable risk
3. The action is scalable to allow for changing conditions
4. The action is supported by Metro's existing policy guidance and in alignment with the ongoing work to update our policy documents
5. The action adds significant new value in one or more of the following areas
 - ▶ Advances our core values
 - ▶ Benefits communities identified as high priority in the Mobility Framework and/or communities where ridership declines have been smallest
 - ▶ Builds organizational resilience
 - ▶ Advances regional economic recovery

From Idea to Implementation

Exterior electronic bus signage



Response Actions and Recovery Recommendations

This section summarizes and categorizes close to 100 individual decisions and actions Metro has taken since early March, as well as recommendations for how we intend to rebuild and recover.



Summary of COVID-19 Response and Recovery Actions

		Duration					Supported Goals					
Theme	Action area	Stay At Home	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Post-COVID	Safe services	Practices aligned with values	Prioritized essential riders	Increased organizational resilience	Climate-friendly economic recovery
How we operate and maintain a safe system	Increased cleaning and sanitization at our facilities, stops, and stations, and on all Metro vehicles							✓	✓			
	Provide safe physical distancing by managing capacity on our services							✓				
	Change when and how we collect fares for safe physical distancing and contactless options							✓				✓
	Give customers the information they need to ride safely							✓	✓	✓		✓
	Develop and implement standards for ventilation on vehicles and in buildings							✓			✓	
How we care for employees	Focus on our employees' health and well-being							✓	✓		✓	
	Ensure a sustainable supply of PPE for employees							✓				
	Rapidly adjust work protocol for a safe workplace							✓				✓
	Revamp how we communicate and engage with employees							✓	✓		✓	
How we adjust service	Develop and implement pandemic-responsive service scenarios							✓		✓	✓	✓
	Build back service to meet customer demand								✓	✓		✓
	Recommendation: Keep transit moving when traffic returns								✓	✓		✓
	Recommendation: Explore all-door boarding							✓				✓
	Recommendation: Work with APTA and national peers to explore the post-COVID future of public transit										✓	✓
How we partner creatively and are responsible financial stewards	Provide special transportation for COVID-19 positive or symptomatic people							✓	✓	✓		✓
	Deliver food with Metro contracted vehicles and drivers								✓			✓
	Review of contracts and billing during reduced service period											✓
	Recommendation: Support local and small businesses around our facilities								✓			✓
	Join regional partners working to address homelessness							✓	✓			✓

How we Operate and Maintain a Safe System During COVID-19

Action: Increase cleaning and sanitization at our facilities, our stops and stations, and on all Metro vehicles

We are sanitizing and deep cleaning our vehicles and facilities routinely to be sure every Metro customer has a safe and healthy ride, and that our employees work in a healthy environment.

Buses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Every vehicle is sanitized and cleaned daily ▶ Every vehicle interior is deep cleaned every 30 days
Rideshare vehicles (Vanpool, Vanshare, Community Van)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Protocol and supplies provided for drivers and participants to sanitize and clean vehicles after every trip ▶ Maintenance facilities disinfect all vehicles before pick up
Access vehicles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Every vehicle is disinfected between trips at special disinfecting sites installed around the county ▶ All vehicles are disinfected again at the end of service each night
Water Taxi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Every vessel is cleaned as required by onboard crew ▶ Every vessel is disinfected twice daily, once at the end of each commute period
Streetcar and Link light rail (operated and maintained by King County Metro)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ All vehicles are cleaned and disinfected daily ▶ All vehicle interiors deep cleaned every 30 days
Bus stops and stations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Shelters are pressure cleaned every week (average)
Metro buildings and facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ High touch areas sanitized twice a day ▶ Deep sanitizing once a week



Equity impact: These changes have been implemented quickly to ensure the health and safety of employees and customers. The accrued equity impact of the changes will be examined as part of Metro’s recovery process.



What happens next?: Customers and employees can expect to see these increased cleaning and sanitization protocols continue through Phase 4 of the Safe Start Washington Phased Reopening Plan. As new technologies and best practices are identified, we will continue to test, adapt, and adopt them to ensure the healthiest environment possible for customers and employees. Given limited budget due to COVID revenue shortfalls, we are also working to develop creative approaches to both meet the need for increased sanitization of our facilities and keep up with routine cleaning.

Action: Provide safe physical distancing by managing capacity on our services

We've ensured each customer has safe physical distancing by developing and implementing passenger limits informed by Public Health – Seattle & King County. At the same time, we've increased the number of bus trips we can run as flexible "extra" service, which adds service to routes at capacity due to COVID physical distancing guidelines.

Load Capacity for Safe Start Washington Reopening Phases, by Metro Service

Passenger Limits			
Mode and Vehicle	Phase 1 and 2	Proposed Phase 3	Proposed Phase 4
35' and 40' Bus	Every row or as needed to facilitate physical distancing	Every other seat	Every seat
60' Bus			
Water Taxi			
Dart			
Community Shuttles			
Access			
Vanpool/Vanshare	2+	2+	2+
Community Van	1 person or two persons from the same household	1 person or family unit	1 person or family unit per row
Via To Transit	1 person or family unit	1 person or family unit	1 person or family unit per row



Equity impact: Our bus routes that reach COVID-19 capacity thresholds most often, and are then forced to pass up customers waiting at stops, are disproportionately routes classified in our Service Guidelines as low income and minority. We are working to mitigate this impact by adding flexible trips that can pick up passengers that a "full" bus has had to skip. We've maintained a regional transit network throughout COVID-19, realizing many of our customers rely on transit as essential workers or for critical needs such as food and medicine. Throughout the crisis, we have carefully monitored ridership demand and trends adding back service to routes, trips, and communities where demand didn't drop as much as it did system-wide.



What happens next?: We will continue to monitor Public Health guidance for King County and update capacity limits as it is safe to do so, using either the Safe Start Washington reopening phases or alternate criteria. If we return to earlier Safe Start Washington phases, we will reduce capacity again. Total capacity will be restored on our services when a vaccine is in wide distribution and/or we resume normal operation.

Action: Move to rear-door boarding and change when and how we collect fares for safe physical distancing and contactless options

Customers were asked to board at the back door and fare collection for all modes was temporarily suspended in March 2020 to protect our operators and our passengers from exposure to COVID-19. Since March, fare enforcement officers have quickly pivoted to providing onboard support for operators and at terminals downtown. As we collect fares again, Metro has instituted additional safety measures for both our employees and customers.

- ▶ Safety partitions
- ▶ Enhanced PPE
- ▶ Additional safety guidance

In order to encourage contactless fare payment, Metro is also:

- ▶ Introducing new tools to make it easy for customers to use cash alternatives
- ▶ Providing self-serve paper transfers to avoid hand-to-hand contact
- ▶ Re-evaluating the appropriateness of fare enforcement, aligned with our values, and adjusting for effective, safe, and equitable standards before fare enforcement starts again.



Equity impact: Riders with disabilities have been impacted by the move to rear-door boarding, adding urgency to our resumption of front-door boarding. Riders with limited access to ORCA cards and/or mobile technology are most impacted by moving toward a contactless system. This includes people with limited English proficiency, as well as people with low and no income. Ensuring that these customers do not experience new barriers to accessing Metro’s mobility services is a key goal as we resume fare collection.



What happens next?: Customers can expect to see fares resume on October 1, when safety measures are in place. Moving forward, Metro will continue to work with partners to increase the use of contactless payment options and will collect fares even if we return to an earlier Safe Start Washington phase.

Action: Give our customers the information they need to ride safely

Evolving public health guidance and changing understanding of COVID-19 transmission and impacts have made it challenging to communicate with all our diverse customers. Examples of tools we're using include:

- ▶ Electronic signage on our buses
- ▶ Blocking off seats to ensure physical distancing
- ▶ Masks required
- ▶ Onboard announcements
- ▶ Advertising



Equity impact: Metro has had to communicate urgently and with new information throughout the pandemic, which can be difficult for people with limited English proficiency and accessibility challenges. We've worked hard to provide as much communication in language as possible, as well as using multiple channels and types of communication.



What happens next?: Customers can expect to see a heightened level of communication on and about our services through Safe Start Washington Phase 4. As King County reopens and we invite more customers back to Metro, customers can expect to see the launch of our new "Ready When You Are" communication campaign. "Ready When You Are" lays out what we are doing to keep customers safe and how we can all do our part. We will also continually work to make our communications accessible and clear to riders with limited English proficiency.





Masks Required

According to Public Health – Seattle & King County, a mask may prevent further community spread of the COVID-19 virus by blocking infectious droplets from spreading when someone with the infection coughs, sneezes, or speaks. It's an important move to promote safety across our fleet for operators, crew, and passengers.

Metro requires that everyone on transit wear a mask. The requirement is highly visible—from the “MASKS REQUIRED” on electronic destination signs, to posters inside transit vehicles, onboard audio announcements, and daily customer communications via email, social media, text, and our website. “Masks required” decals in English and Spanish also are being added to bus doors.

Our team members regularly observe mask compliance on a sample of our four highest-ridership routes (RapidRide A, D, and E lines, and Route 7). The percentage of passengers using a mask across those routes was above 80% in early September.

The mask directive requires voluntary compliance, and Metro operators do not prevent passengers without face coverings from boarding. To prevent potential conflicts with operators (who are primarily focused on safely operating the bus) and to protect the dignity of our passengers with health conditions, our operators are not tasked with personally enforcing the mask mandate. We ask customers also to be respectful of fellow passengers who may have health conditions that are not visible but prevent them from wearing a mask.



Improved Access to Masks for Riders

Alongside new safety partitions, we are installing mask dispensers, starting with a first wave of 102 RapidRide buses on the A and F lines in south King County and 60-foot trolley buses on routes 7, 36, 43, 44, and 49 in Seattle. Metro intends to install more dispensers on other high-ridership routes in the future.

Each dispenser holds about 150 masks, and Metro will monitor demand and refill them as needed. The King County Council designated funds to purchase and make available masks on public transportation. Finally, the Department of Community and Health Services Health Ambassadors are providing information and masks at high-ridership locations.



Action: Develop and implement standards for ventilation on vehicles and in buildings

We are researching and implementing best practice for ventilation, air flow, and air purification on Metro vehicles and in Metro-owned buildings. With over 20 Metro-owned buildings and vehicle types that range from marine water taxi vessels to crane trucks, we are reviewing all our ventilation systems. We are also researching new technologies for effectiveness and applicability to Metro ventilation systems, such as the introduction of UV lighting to air purification systems. Such purification would clean the air in our vehicles and buildings, and enable the introduction of outside air flow.



Equity impact: These changes benefit our customers who rely on our service.



What happens next?: Customers and employees can expect to see windows remaining open on all our vehicles that have operable windows (as the weather permits) and ventilation systems running at full capacity. Customers can also expect additional information as new ventilation and air filtration, purification tools, and techniques are adopted.

How We Care for our Employees

Action: Focus on our employees' health and well-being

COVID-19 has had a big impact on our employees' health and wellbeing. We are working to support our employees during this time with a range of tools. One of the most important tools we use is providing COVID-related leave options, communicating clearly about county and federal leave options, and coordinating them to maximize employee benefit and support. Knowing that they have a safety net in case they or a loved one becomes ill allows our employees to show up at work every day, ready to serve our customers who rely on them. It also allows them to stay home when they are ill, reducing the chance of viral spread.



Equity impact: Clear, organized COVID-19 leave policies and general health and well-being support are particularly critical for our frontline employees who are less likely to be able to telework and have less schedule flexibility.



What happens next?: We will continue to organize support of our employees, clearly communicating to them about their benefits and leave options. With the start of school in King County almost entirely online in the fall of 2020, we recognize the need to support our employees who have educational and caregiving responsibilities for children who would otherwise have been in school. In addition, many employees have now exhausted their leave options, so we are working to maximize schedule flexibility and also training supervisors to support employees.



Action: Ensure we always have a sustainable supply of recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) for every employee

Since the first days of the pandemic, we have been researching best practices for PPE and working diligently to find supply. To date, we have provided over 100,000 masks, 3,600 face shields (generously donated by Flukes manufacturing in Everett), over 1.4 million gloves, and over 1 million wipes for employees. We partnered with the Refugee Artisan Initiative to produce and distribute 10,000 cloth masks to employees, and with Wildwood Distillery to produce and distribute over 600 gallons of hand sanitizer.



Equity impact: PPE protects our frontline employees and customers who rely on their services.



What happens next?: As disposable gloves and masks become commonplaces, the need for more sustainable alternatives is clear. We will begin by reviewing the sustainability filter in our procurement process and work with our supply chain and vendors to research sustainable alternatives. Customers and employees can expect to see the distribution and use of PPE through all the Safe Start Washington phases.



Photo: refugeearts.org

Action: Rapidly adjust work protocol for a safe workplace

The past months have brought many rapid changes to our work places, all with the goal of ensuring a safe and supportive environment. Changes have touched everything from how operators and dispatchers interact at our bases, to radically shifting the way transit operators and other staff pick work assignments, the cancellation of the much-beloved MetroRodeos, the introduction of health screenings for all employees, and the transition to telework for over 800 staff members.



Equity impact: These changes have been implemented quickly to ensure the health and safety of employees. The accrued equity impact of the changes will be examined as part of Metro's recovery process.



What happens next?: Now that many of the necessary health and safety changes are in place, we are focusing our trainings to meet the new crisis response and recovery needs of our workforce. Employees can expect to see an increased emphasis on best practices in telework, virtual interaction, and management. Most new safety protocol will remain in place through at least Phase 3 of the Safe Start Washington Recovery Plan, and perhaps longer depending on Public Health recommendations.



Telework

While most of Metro's over 5,000 employees are not able to telework, over 800 of our people are able to perform their duties while working remotely. These employees represent job classifications from Customer Service Representatives to Capital Project Managers, and many others.

In early March, King County Executive Dow Constantine asked all employees who were able to do so to begin teleworking to help slow the spread of COVID-19. Over 800 Metro employees immediately complied, abruptly transitioning to new tools, new ways of interacting with colleagues and customers, and new challenges. These challenges have included managing work-life balance when work is always at home, while simultaneously taking on increased caregiving and education responsibilities with the closure of schools, eldercare facilities, and other traditional caregiving and educational support systems. While these challenges are real, many employees also report increased productivity and appreciation for new ways of connecting and collaborating using online tools.

As King County enters future phases of the Safe Start Washington Phased Reopening Plan, Metro is committed to thoughtfully addressing our long-term workplace needs. Our approach will prioritize employee safety, reflect lessons learned during the remote work period, and take employee feedback into account.

Action: Revamp how we communicate and engage with employees

Since the onset of the pandemic, we've updated and added employee communications, engagement processes, and tools to adapt to emerging employee needs. Our tools have evolved to match how employees are responding to the COVID crisis and our ramp-up and recovery efforts. We've made these changes to improve two-way communication, including the flow of information out and feedback coming in, and to provide spaces and places to reconnect, process, and problem solve around the effects of COVID on our Metro community. New tools include:

- ▶ Management worksite walk-throughs for those employees not able to work from home
- ▶ Virtual weekly leader check-ins
- ▶ Short videos on key themes and frequently asked questions
- ▶ Creation of an employee website
- ▶ New employee virtual sessions
- ▶ Establishment of an email delivery channel for employees without county email addresses



Equity impact: Many frontline employees do not use county email addresses. As much management communication moved online it became a critical equity issue to be able to reach these employees quickly. The proposed tools support Metro's frontline workforce.



What happens next?: Employees can expect Metro to continue to fine-tune its communications tools and develop new ones. In addition, as the pandemic has continued and morale has ebbed with the layoffs of staff, the need for renewed energy celebrating our frontline employees is clear; a campaign to recognize the hard work of our colleagues in the field is planned.



How We Adjust Service

Action: Develop and implement responsive service scenarios

Due to health safety and COVID-related employee absences, Metro reduced service across its fixed-route network three times between March 23 and April 20, and made multiple other changes to services across all modes. These changes have been guided by early planning to ensure that they are implementable. Building on this experience, Metro is preparing operations scenarios in order to be quickly prepared for a ramp down in service, should operator absences or health guidelines warrant, and as conditions improve be able to flexibly bring back service.



Equity impact: These pandemic-responsive scenarios are designed to provide service to those who need it most, including communities of color, low-income communities, and people who rely on transit for their essential trips. They also focus service additions on those routes where demand is exceeding COVID-19 capacity limits.



What happens next?: With the September 2020 service change, we set a new baseline for regular service, and have created ramp up and ramp down service scenarios around that baseline that can be used if King County experiences a significant virus resurgence, impacting staff availability. These scenarios can be implemented quickly, allowing flexible changes based on current conditions, including bringing back service if conditions improve.



Action: Build Back Service to Meet Increasing Customer Demand

From now through pandemic recovery, Metro will continue to regularly monitor service performance, ridership demand, and regional criteria for recovery in order to gradually restore suspended service and address crowding on existing service. The goal is to meet customer demand and provide attractive, safe, reliable service as people return to taking more trips on transit.

The following route-level criteria will be tracked and examined along with workforce availability to set priorities for restoration and support decision-making about how much service to restore. These criteria are focused on fixed-route restoration, which represents the majority of overall service suspended.

Ridership	Percent of pre-pandemic ridership retained
Crowding	Number of trips above the COVID-19 load limit and percentage of load limit capacity (This metric will change as load limits change)
Equity	Information from the Mobility Framework (that considers the location of and services for people of color, low-income, limited English proficiency, and populations with disabilities) will inform route restoration and decision-making
Employers	Information on various qualitative and quantitative factors including, ORCA passholders and current and forecasted status for large employers in designated regional job hubs
Productivity	Pre-pandemic (fall 2019 service change) and current rides per platform hour, from the most recent month for which data is available

In addition to these route level criteria, the following regional demand criteria will be tracked and considered in deciding how much service to restore.

Governor’s Safe Start phases	Phase we are currently in or significant adjustments to allowed activities in phases
Back to school	Status of in-person classes at major colleges, universities, and area school districts
Back to work	Status of largest employers throughout the county

Metro will continue to engage regularly with stakeholders and community to identify trends or critical issues that would suggest a need to change or restore service to supplement this information.



Equity impact: Service restoration will be prioritized to serve those who need it most, including communities of color and low-income communities, and people who rely on transit for their essential trips.



What happens next?: Metro will monitor performance indicators in order to make assessments about future demand. These assessments will inform increases in service both at Metro’s twice-annual major service changes in March and September, and between service changes by adding supplemental trips to routes with high demand.



Recovery Recommendation: Keep transit moving when traffic returns

As our county reopens and more people return to in-person school, work and events, there is a real danger that traffic congestion will increase to even higher levels than before the pandemic. We are working with our regional partners to make transit priority improvements in key corridors now. These transit priority treatments will benefit the people most at risk when traffic comes roaring back and gridlock threatens the region.



Next steps: We are partnering with the Washington State Department of Transportation and cities throughout King County to identify and develop near-term transit priority projects. Our focus is on corridor plans that benefit low-income, minority, and transit-dependent riders.



Learning from our peers: In June of this year, an initial group of temporary emergency transit lanes was approved by the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) Board of Directors. Based on ridership and travel time data, these transit lanes will benefit customers on five SFMTA Municipal routes which are critical to neighborhoods with high percentages of people of color and low-income households.



Recovery Recommendation: Explore all-door boarding

Allowing bus boarding at all doors leads to a faster trip for our customers. And during the COVID-19 pandemic, it also leads to a safer trip by providing more space for passengers to spread out, eliminating crowding at the front door of the bus, and supporting contactless fare payment.



Next steps: Work with our existing Next Generation ORCA project to determine the feasibility of accelerating all-door boarding on some or all of Metro's routes, in addition to RapidRide (already slated for all-door boarding). Accompany this with reevaluating our approach to fare enforcement in light of our goals to provide a fair and equitable service.



Learning from our peers: All-door boarding is an internationally recognized best practice for transit, providing benefits both during the COVID-19 pandemic and during routine operations.

Recovery Recommendation: Work with national peers to explore the post-COVID future of public transit

The long-term impacts of COVID-19 on public transit will take some time to be fully understood. We are committed to a thoughtful examination of the new challenges and opportunities.



Next steps: We will develop recommendations through 2021 and will integrate any that have long-term impacts to our future service into Metro's policy updates that will be transmitted to County Council in fall of that year.



Learning from our peers: The American Public Transit Association (APTA) is convening transit agencies from around North America to think together about the future of public transit post-COVID and other emerging technological, demographic, and economic changes. King County Metro, along with our national peers, is developing recommendations for instilling customer confidence, shaping our service to meet demand, and building infrastructure in a post-pandemic world to bring riders back to Metro services.

How We Partner Creatively and Are Responsible Fiscal Stewards

Action: Provide special transportation for COVID-19 positive or symptomatic people

In partnership with King County’s Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) and Public Health – Seattle & King County (Public Health), Metro engaged its Access paratransit contractor, MV Transportation, to create a service to move COVID-19 positive or symptomatic individuals to and from Public Health isolation/quarantine sites, and medical facilities, homeless shelters, assisted living facilities, and other locations housing vulnerable individuals, including personal homes. The service was developed in anticipation of the possibility that the rate of COVID-19 infections would exceed the surge capacity of ambulances and other first responders, and in order to ensure the continued functioning of the region’s health care systems.

Metro custom outfitted a small fleet of Access vehicles with floor-to-ceiling driver compartment shields to protect driver safety. Public Health provided personal protective equipment, and trained operators in its safe use. A separate dispatch system and phone number has also been established and the service has been dubbed, “Transportation for Pandemic Response.”



Equity impact: This service was quickly stood up to serve King County’s highest risk and most vulnerable populations, including those experiencing housing insecurity.



What happens next?: Since the service started, Transportation for Pandemic Response has transported over 1,400 individuals and averages about 10 trips a day. Public Health expects service demand to increase during the fall & winter flu season, though the extent of the increase is highly uncertain. Looking ahead, Public Health is currently planning to continue this service through 2021.





Action: Deliver food with Metro contracted vehicles and drivers

In March 2020, food banks and community centers providing meal programs began to provide food delivery for clients required to stay home due to high risk of COVID-19 exposure. Metro was called on to support these services due to the high volume, and quick response needed to reach clients. With ridership and resource requirements very low, Metro was well positioned to re-deploy resources, and support an urgent community need in the first months of the COVID-19 crisis.



Equity impact: The food delivery program addresses serious, growing food security risks for disadvantaged populations most in need by providing a life-sustaining service for very vulnerable populations, which are disproportionately people of color. For some customers, this service provides their only meal for the day.



What happens next?: Metro, working with its contracted service operators, expects to continue food delivery through late 2020, as long as available funding supports the work. Metro is committed to working with its partners at the City of Seattle Emergency Feeding Task Force and Public Health-Seattle & King County to review the need for the program in 2021 and develop an approach that allows Metro to transition its services back to essential transportation as demand for those services grows.

Action: Review of contracts and billing during reduced service period

As the pandemic disrupted all aspects of life in King County, many of our business account partners such as schools and employers (both large and small) found their need for Metro service temporarily upended. In addition, many of the incentives and disincentives built into our contracts with service providers no longer made sense. We've adjusted billing cycles and product offerings, and provided credits for free fare months with the goal of being a good partner and practicing strong financial stewardship.



Equity impact: These changes have been implemented quickly to ensure continued operation of critical services in a new pandemic environment. The accrued equity impact of the changes will be examined as part of Metro's recovery process.



What happens next?: As King County moves further into the Safe Start Washington Reopening phases and activities such as in-person schooling and reduced teleworking begin again, we will continue to review and adjust our partner contracts and billing as appropriate. Working with our business partners has enabled the business program to remain relevant as we prepare for recovery, and we have retained almost 80% of our business customers as a result.



Recovery Recommendation: Support local and small businesses around our facilities

With over 25 facilities spread throughout King County, Metro's employees help support a wide range of small retail stores, restaurants, and other businesses next to those facilities. The pandemic has had catastrophic effects on many of these businesses, and employee telecommuting and changed work schedules have reduced their flow of customers. We are committed to supporting the businesses and communities that surround our facilities.



Next steps: Working through the already-existing infrastructure of our Employee Giving Programs, set up a program giving employees direct avenues to support local businesses near their place of work.



Learning from our peers: Organizations around King County have begun developing tools to help small businesses that depend on employees in now-empty workspaces. A local example is the Chinatown-International District Small Business Relief Fund, which had provided aid to 165 businesses with over \$750,000 in donations through July 2020.

Recovery Recommendation: Join with regional partners to address homelessness

As traditional places of shelter closed in the early days of the pandemic, many of our riders experiencing homelessness turned to Metro services as a safe space for shelter. This placed a strain on our frontline employees and our system as a whole, and left these riders with inadequate shelter options. In addition, as many transit stops, stations, and park-and-rides are temporarily being used less for transportation, there has been an increase in the use of these spaces by people seeking shelter. This has made such areas unavailable for people trying to use them for transportation purposes.



Next steps: Build relationships with new and existing regional partners to increase support for unhoused riders. Work with stakeholders and partners to identify opportunities that better meet the needs of individuals using buses and transit facilities for shelter. Start with a focus on the existing data related to the riders who routinely rely on Metro services for shelter. Simultaneously, work to better define the role Metro plays in supporting the regional effort to end homelessness, while continuing to provide safe and equitable transit service to the community.



Learning from our peers: In their COVID-19 Recovery Plan, LA Metro identified the regional crisis of homelessness and its impacts on the Los Angeles region's transit system, while looking forward to potential solutions: "Transit agencies cannot solve the problem of homelessness alone, but with the right policies, partnerships and programs, they can create a safer and more comfortable environment for all transit users."

For a detailed list of all COVID-19 Response and Recovery actions taken to date by King County Metro, see Appendix B COVID-19 Response and Recovery Report: Actions Detail.

How will we know if we're successful?

Tracking Progress

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to change and unfold, and as Metro moves from response to recovery, we fully expect that new challenges and opportunities will emerge. We are committed to reporting back every quarter through Safe Start Phase 4. We will update our progress on the actions and recommendations identified here, as well as share any new challenges, actions, and recommendations.

An Ideal Day

In the end, Metro's rapid interventions and long-term care strategies for our employees, customers, and the region must add up to a positive experience for all. The next two scenarios represent ideal days for Metro customers and employees.



Safe Start Washington Phase 2— Ideal Customer Experience Scenario

About me

- ▶ I live in King County
- ▶ I use public transit
- ▶ I commute daily for work

My expectations

- ▶ Metro will provide a safe commuting option
- ▶ Metro will provide reliable service
- ▶ Metro will inform me of changes to my commute and how to use the system safely

Planning for my commute

- ▶ I can plan for my commute by looking up schedules
- ▶ An extra bus arrives shortly after my scheduled bus if it is at capacity
- ▶ I get real time alerts
- ▶ I know what I need to do to ride safely and am prepared with a mask

My actual commute

- ▶ My bus shows up when I expect it to
- ▶ My bus is not at capacity and I am able to board or another bus arrives quickly if it is at capacity
- ▶ Clear signage directs me and fellow passengers about social distancing and safety measures
- ▶ I pay for my fare with my ORCA card

- ▶ There are clear physical distancing guidelines on the bus and they are respected by me and my fellow passengers
- ▶ My bus is clean and has been sanitized; the windows are open and the ventilation system is running
- ▶ My bus operator is monitoring capacity and will stop picking up customers if it reaches capacity
- ▶ I am wearing my mask, as are most of my fellow passengers; my bus has masks available if I forget my mask

My experience

- ▶ I have reached my destination on time
- ▶ I don't have any concerns of being exposed to COVID-19
- ▶ There were no surprises or anything unexpected
- ▶ I feel comfortable and safe using transit
- ▶ I would recommend transit to friends and family



Safe Start Washington Phase 2—Ideal Employee Experience Scenario

About me

- ▶ I work at one of Metro's bus bases
- ▶ I have been approved to work at my physical worksite
- ▶ I am healthy
- ▶ I will comply with Metro's guidance to keep myself and others safe

My expectations

- ▶ Metro will meet or exceed all regulations and mandates
- ▶ Metro will provide me with a safe and clean environment to work in
- ▶ Metro will communicate clearly so I know what to expect
- ▶ Metro will supply me with personal safety equipment
- ▶ Metro will clean the work place and high-touch areas often and consistently

Commuting to work

- ▶ When I commute to work, I know my transportation options
- ▶ I can avoid rush hour so that if I am using transit, my buses will not be at capacity
- ▶ I know what is expected of me when I get to the base and am prepared

Arrive to the base

- ▶ I am wearing a fabric mask that has been provided by Metro
- ▶ I am given a disposable mask at the entrance if I forget my mask
- ▶ There is hand sanitizer at the entryway for me to use
- ▶ There are physical distancing signs that people respect
- ▶ I can self-assess that I am healthy
- ▶ I get my temperature checked and do a health screen upon entry
- ▶ Elevators have a maximum capacity, I wait for the next elevator



At my workspace

- ▶ I follow physical distancing guideline posters so that I can move about the workspace freely
- ▶ Employee congregation is discouraged though physical distancing signs
- ▶ I have hand sanitizer available at all entry ways and high traffic areas
- ▶ I have disinfectant wipes so that I can wipe my workspace, door handles, light switches and equipment
- ▶ The air filtration is up to standard and new air is cycled through
- ▶ I know what the protocol is to alert facilities that a workspace needs attention

Meetings and communal space

- ▶ Occupancy limits for meeting rooms are posted; some employees will meet in person, but majority will participate virtually
- ▶ There are posted physical distancing guidelines
- ▶ Some rooms are marked as closed or not usable
- ▶ Meals are taken at individual workspace and no shared food is put out
- ▶ Sanitation wipes are available for microwave and refrigerator usage
- ▶ Wherever possible, appliances are touchless

Appendix A

COVID-19 Response and Recovery Report: Community and Employee Engagement Summary

To best serve our region during the pandemic, Metro has heard from and engaged with a diverse sampling of the community, including:

- ▶ Metro employees
- ▶ customers, both current and potential
- ▶ businesses
- ▶ elected officials
- ▶ various jurisdictions
- ▶ community partners representing vulnerable, priority populations

Feedback from these different audiences largely focused on several key themes, listed below. While different audiences had strong opinions about each topic, their perspectives differed based on their experience of the service (especially differing between customers and employees).

Metro's Partnerships and Engagement team also created a communications structure and team to ensure centralized coordination and rollout of communications to employees, agency partners, community stakeholders, jurisdictions, elected officials and more. Details about Metro's employee communications during the COVID-19 response period can be found at the end of this appendix.

The primary themes we heard throughout this time included:

- ▶ Employee concerns about personal safety, personal protective equipment (PPE), communications, and decision-making
- ▶ Cleanliness, health, and safety were top concerns for customers and employees
- ▶ Customers with disabilities experienced greater challenges due to some of the changes made in response to COVID, like capacity limits and rear-door boarding
- ▶ Countywide and statewide mandates for masks in public spaces led to added concerns from both customers and employees about enforcing mask usage and the availability of masks on Metro service
- ▶ In order to adhere to social distancing standards, Metro instituted capacity limits with unintended consequences of pass-ups and crowding
- ▶ Service levels were reduced several times during Metro's initial COVID response; feedback focused on the impacts of those reductions and how well those reductions were communicated with customers

We also consulted with the Equity Cabinet and the Transit Advisory Commission about what they envision, hope, and fear for mobility in a post-COVID future.

Engagement activities during COVID response

Metro staff conducted engagement through various channels during the initial response to COVID from March 2020 to September 2020. Engagement was conducted and adapted to virtual channels to the extent possible regarding specific COVID-19 response and recovery activities. In addition, a robust communications structure ensured that we had regular communication with employees, agency partners, community stakeholders, jurisdictions, elected officials, and more. Engagement with stakeholders and community members will continue throughout the recovery period. Below is a sampling of the activities conducted by Metro staff across the agency during this time.

- ▶ Division leaders started holding hour-long virtual listening sessions with employees across Metro since the beginning of the pandemic. These sessions provided an opportunity to share information as well as hear concerns directly from employees and have specific discussions
- ▶ Metro conducted a survey on COVID-19 Impacts from June 30 to July 15, 2020 through multi-modal data collection with 1,548 respondents in King County participating in Metro's Rider and Non-Rider survey. (Survey is cited below as Rider/Non-Rider Survey)
- ▶ Community Relations staff met with community-based organizations via phone or teleconference to better understand any mobility needs and challenges related to Metro's reductions of the service network during the early months of the pandemic
- ▶ Staff participated in the Pandemic Community Advisory Group, convened by Public Health, to hear community concerns directly, and share information and gather feedback about Metro's service reductions
- ▶ Metro's Customer Information Office tracked trends and patterns in customer complaints and concerns during this time, elevating issues for response as needed, such as an increase in pass-ups of customers with disabilities. (Customer complaints and trends observed by the Customer Information Office are cited below as Customer Information Office)
- ▶ Community Relations staff consulted with stakeholders and community members from priority populations on specific decisions or proposals related to COVID response, such as making signage more accessible for people with low vision
- ▶ Community Relations staff met with small groups of stakeholders representing key priority populations, such as people experiencing homelessness, to consult with them about different services or programs Metro considered. For example, Metro consulted with a small group of stakeholders and conducted an online survey to determine whether Metro should move forward with reservation-based night service
- ▶ Government Relations staff facilitated town halls with local jurisdictions to hear their concerns and share updates about Metro service in response to COVID-19
- ▶ Metro continued to meet with pre-existing stakeholder groups including the Mobility Equity Cabinet and Transit Advisory Commission to get their feedback on Metro's response to COVID, service reductions, policy and strategic plan updates, and Metro's recovery. Those groups meet on a monthly basis and continue to meet remotely over Zoom

Key themes

Feedback from Metro employees

As of March 17, 2020 division leaders started holding virtual listening sessions with employees across all of Metro. These are hour-long meetings, held on Zoom, led by division leaders to provide an opportunity for more specific and relevant discussions, as well as providing consistent information on available resources, leave options, and other issues that affected all Metro employees. To date, Metro has held over 137 virtual sessions with employees since March 2020.

Metro also used virtual sessions throughout the month of August to gather feedback from employees about what they would need to feel comfortable in the workplace, as well as what Metro should do to make customers feel comfortable on board our services. The following feedback was incorporated into the recovery recommendations.

- ▶ Providing consistent communication with enough detail has been challenging in a rapidly changing environment, but rapid change has slowed so the pace and content of our communications has been adapted
- ▶ Many frontline employees fear for their safety, are not feeling heard, and desire concrete change as fast as possible
- ▶ People express confusion about what decisions have been made and a desire to influence decisions yet to be made
- ▶ Employees expressed concerns and ideas around the biennial budget regarding Metro's budget shortfall and how that would impact the workforce, how to get riders back on transit, PPE, fares, and how Metro could go cashless
- ▶ Some employees also expressed the need to find more sustainable and less regressive funding sources for transit, and that transit should be funded as critical infrastructure like the police, fire department, and EMS
- ▶ The top three areas of concerns and questions were HR/Leave (16%), internal communication (17.5%), personal safety/PPE (10%) and policies/procedures (11%). Other categories included rider behavior, cleaning/sanitizing, emergency/hazard pay, service cuts/overcrowding, telecommuting, social distancing, and community support

Key takeaway: The top concerns from employees are around HR/leave policies, internal communication, personal safety, and PPE. Frontline staff fear for their safety and want actions that will protect them to be implemented quickly and transparently, and would like an opportunity to weigh in on those decisions.

Cleanliness, health, and safety

Public Health guidance asks everyone to practice physical distancing of 6 feet or more, frequent handwashing or sanitizer, and use of cloth face coverings in public. Since the early days of the pandemic in March, Metro began disinfecting coaches daily. Concerns about cleanliness on board the bus to protect health and safety of customers and operators have been a common concern, as well as cleanliness at stops and shelters.

- ▶ Current customers, unemployed people, people of color, and Seattle/North King residents report a higher impact from Metro’s COVID response (Rider/Non-Rider Survey)
- ▶ Shelter and stop cleanliness were common concerns for customers, especially during March. COVID-related feedback in March was focused on cleanliness on board the bus, as well as shelter and stop cleanliness with a heightened awareness of biohazards. From March to July 2020, 605 comments mentioned the word “safe” and 284 comments mentioned the key words “cleaning needs, protocols, and products.” 579 comments in the same time period mentioned “COVID, corona, virus and pandemic.” (Customer Information Office)
- ▶ King County Transit Advisory Commission members, over half of whom are people with disabilities, inquired about cleaning practices. Some stopped taking transit due to identifying in a high-risk category, and were interested to hear what cleaning/disinfecting practices Metro was doing on fixed route and Access Paratransit
- ▶ Employees in the virtual sessions recommended being more public about cleaning and disinfecting of buses whether through better communication and publicizing our practices, or even doing cleaning on site at stops

Key takeaway: Cleanliness—and communicating about what Metro is doing to clean and keep the service safe for both customers and employees—is critical for riders and employees to feel safe on board Metro services and in the workplace.

Concerns from customers with disabilities

Reductions in service, rear-door boarding, and capacity limits (especially in the priority seating area) affected riders with disabilities significantly, with complaints from riders with disabilities or mobility challenges nearly doubling during COVID-era operations. As a proportion of all complaints, they nearly tripled, reflecting the particular challenges that COVID-era operations at Metro have had on a highly transit-dependent community.

- ▶ The complaints from customers with disabilities or mobility challenges nearly doubled during COVID operations. Rear-door boarding, including the challenges of accessing that entrance in some zones, and the severe capacity limits in the priority seating area have resulted in many riders with disabilities or mobility aides experiencing significant frustration and unreliable service. A further source of customer friction is the inconsistent treatment such riders receive, with some operators deploying the ramp and/or kneeling the bus while others do not. (Customer Information Office)
- ▶ Metro gathered feedback from several community stakeholders with disabilities about the practice of operators offering a mask to an ADA rider. While some would likely appreciate the offer, there are serious concerns around the hygiene of a mask, the ability of someone to put a mask on themselves due to their disability, and what the reaction would be from Metro operator/security if they refused the offer for any reason. Fare payment and boarding/securement is already an issue of tension for ADA riders who are treated differently/inconsistently depending on driver’s willingness to secure them and the rider’s ability to communicate effectively

- ▶ Metro engaged with several community members with disabilities, and staff from Rooted in Rights and Alliance of People with disAbilities about the safety strap, signage for seat closed signs, and masks. Because of their feedback, signage on seats to indicate they were “closed” to maintain social distancing and safety strap signage was adapted to be more high contrast for people with low-vision. An additional operations bulletin was issued for operators to take added safety precautions before securing someone in a mobility device, such as the application of gloves and hand sanitizer

Key takeaway: Riders with disabilities are facing greater challenges riding transit due to some of the measures taken to address COVID-19; inconsistency in how policies are implemented results in inconsistent treatment of customers.

Mask usage and enforcement

King County issued a directive requiring individuals to wear masks in public spaces, including on transit in May. Governor Inslee’s June 26 statewide mask order, and the July 7 order requiring businesses to refuse service to customers who are not using a mask or face covering, are the backdrop to continued and increasing customer feedback about masks on transit. Masks were mentioned 673 times in customer feedback from the Customer Information Office from March through July 2020.

- ▶ During COVID operation, operator-rider friction and the very challenging conditions that drivers have faced contributed to “employee conduct” being the most common theme of rider complaints. Issues most frequently appearing in employee conduct complaints from March to July 2020 in the Customer Information Office included:
 - ▶ Masks (20%)—operators not wearing them, customer reports of being hassled or refused service for not wearing them, customers expecting operators to enforce mask usage among other passengers, and becoming angry or frustrated with operators’ action or inaction. (Customer Information Office)
 - ▶ Front-door boarding (20%)—passengers needing/requesting front-door boarding reported being hassled, made to use the rear door, refused service, or passed up. (Customer Information Office)
- ▶ Through the virtual sessions, employees (especially operators) also expressed concerns about mask usage and enforcement on board, including passengers not wearing masks and wanting the mask requirement to be promoted more publicly for employees and customers, as well as making masks available for the public. Some would like to be able to deny service to those not wearing masks, like other businesses, such as grocery stores
- ▶ Some employees appreciated the internal mask enforcement policy to encourage mask usage among employees, since some divisions do not have very good mask usage
- ▶ Of the steps Metro has taken so far, mask requirements, disinfecting buses daily, limiting capacity, and social distancing have had the greatest impact on likely usage for lapsed riders (which totaled 786 of the 1,548 surveyed). In general, mask-related concerns, particularly complaints about other riders not wearing them, posed some of the most prominent challenges with riding Metro. Challenges with maintaining social distancing were also a commonly cited concern. (Rider/Non-Rider Survey)

- ▶ King County Council had many concerns about rider and driver safety, but primarily focused on masks for operators and the safety of riders. The council appropriated a supplemental budget item to procure mask dispensers on board the buses, which are currently being piloted. Metro also partnered with the King County Department of Community and Human Services for their Health Ambassador program. Former Metro bus drivers are among the first cohort that are providing support at high-ridership bus stops in downtown Seattle and transit centers in communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 including Aurora, Burien, Federal Way, Kent, and Tukwila. Ambassadors are focused on educating residents on how to reduce the spread of COVID-19

Key takeaway: Mask usage and enforcement remains top-of-mind for both customers and employees. Both customers and employees would like to see each other wearing masks more often, and some customers and employees would want to see greater enforcement of the mask policy on board the coach and in the workplace. Elected officials are highly interested in this topic as well.

Social distancing, crowding, and pass-ups

Capacity limits combined with reduced service have led to an issue with “crowding” when the bus is full. This has been a source of frustration and/or anxiety for customers. Despite Metro adding supplemental service on certain routes to mitigate crowding and pass-ups at certain times of day, crowding is still an issue on some routes.

- ▶ Customers report inconsistent treatment as some operators reportedly firmly enforce restrictive coach capacity limits while others reportedly do not. 466 comments mentioned the key words “crowds, social distancing, and packed buses” from March to July 2020. (Customer Information Office)
- ▶ Many customers described themselves as or empathized with essential workers who felt their health and safety were at risk due to the numbers and/or behavior of these “non-destination riders.” Many believed this to be a result of the fare collection suspension. 261 comments mentioned “non-destination riders” from March to July 2020. (Customer Information Office)
- ▶ Jurisdictions were concerned about the social distancing of passengers and monitoring crowding on board
- ▶ Metro engaged with several stakeholders including the Transit Riders’ Union, Transportation Choices Coalition, the Seattle King County Coalition on Homelessness, and members of the Equity Cabinet on how to best serve non-destination riders, specifically in regards to a proposed reservation-based night service

Key takeaway: The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the need for Metro to engage across sectors, including the rest of the county, to better address the root causes of societal issues like homelessness and mental health crises.

Service levels and communicating service changes

Metro reduced service several times during the early months of the pandemic in response to reduced ridership and workforce availability. These reductions happened quickly, and other operational changes like capacity limits, rear-door boarding, and the suspension of fares impacted the customer experience. Metro worked to ensure that service reductions did not disproportionately impact areas of the county where ridership remained higher throughout COVID-19, and where higher ridership is occurring in places of the county with higher proportions of people of color and people with low income. Metro also worked to add back service based on where higher usage occurred.

- ▶ While coach capacity limits have meant that customers may be unpredictably passed up, other aspects of COVID operations have also contributed to perceptions of unreliable service. Missed stop and overload complaints have been exacerbated by the combination of coach capacity limits and restrictions on front-door boarding, with over 800 comments about missed stops from March 1 – July 7, 2020. Complaints about early operation numbered just below 200, an increase as a proportion of complaints overall, with traffic patterns, lower ridership, and fare suspension all contributing to the difficulty of schedule adherence. In addition, the changing service profile of reductions, limited restoration, scheduled supplemental and standby supplemental coaches deployed as needed, complicated the accuracy of published scheduled and real-time trip data, impacting customer confidence about when or whether they could expect their bus to operate. (Customer Information Office)
- ▶ Smaller jurisdictions like Snoqualmie and North Bend were concerned about reductions in service and value for tax dollars, seeking on-demand shuttles and partnership with Snoqualmie Valley Transportation
- ▶ Relatively little feedback from customers was focused on the communication and customer information about what services were or were not running. New technology that enabled canceled trips and reduced schedule advisories to be reflected in third-party apps, and the integration of the reduced schedule into Puget Sound Trip Planner itineraries also provided customers with service information as it changed over time in the last several months. (Customer Information Office)
- ▶ Community feedback, including the Pandemic Community Advisory Group, requested materials in-language about service reductions at the same time as the English materials were posted online
 - ▶ By the second and third service reduction, Metro posted in-language materials about service reductions simultaneously with English materials. Metro also created a Community Partner Toolkit with social media, posters, flyers, and information materials in-language and shared it with community-based organizations, community partners, mobility boards, and other stakeholders regularly with updates

Key takeaway: Riders are concerned about the reliability of service given the reduced schedules and capacity limits which have impacted their confidence in the bus. Having materials about the reduced schedule in other languages simultaneously was critical to ensuring that communities could stay informed about schedule changes.



Case study

Night Owl Service

King County Metro instituted transit service reductions and new passenger limits aboard buses in response to COVID-19. This affects how riders get to and from work and take other essential trips, particularly on our 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. service. Operators and customer complaints report a lack of compliance with social distancing requirements and a higher volume of non-destinational riders, particularly on routes RapidRide A Line, RapidRide C Line, RapidRide D Line, RapidRide E Line, Route 120, Route 180, Route 7, and routes with late night service. Metro solicited riders' experiences, ideas for improving late night service, and feedback on one concept for Metro's Night Owl service, which would be a reservation-based system where all passengers boarding buses between 1 a.m. and 5 a.m. would book their essential trip in advance using a free reservation system. (Interpreter and TTY services would be available.)

Metro conducted an online survey in English and Spanish in late May 2020, with 451 responses. Metro also engaged with a small group of community stakeholders including two members of Metro's Equity Cabinet, Transportation Choices Coalition, Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness, and the Transit Riders' Union. Stakeholders expressed concerns that this appeared to be blocking homeless people from accessing late night service and for riders without access to a phone, as well as the level of outreach and access for riders with limited English proficiency. Metro did not move forward with the service due in part to these concerns.

Moving forward in a post-COVID future

Feedback on what we need to focus on in a post-COVID mobility future from the Transit Advisory Commission and the Equity Cabinet included the following.

- ▶ Transit should be funded like infrastructure, and needs regional funding (and a less regressive source than sales tax)
- ▶ Getting people back on transit
- ▶ Off-peak priorities should include serving low-income riders, hours that align with food bank operations, diversify Water Taxi ridership with shuttles to White Center, and more weekend hours
- ▶ Concerns about cleanliness, and the potential health impacts of sharing rides, will remain as people come back to transit
- ▶ Right-size service especially in more rural or less dense areas
- ▶ Consider having ambassadors instead of law enforcement. This could also help address litter and cleanliness issues
- ▶ Remembering our essential riders, including those who are houseless, undocumented, essential and frontline workers who are transit-dependent, childcare providers, etc.
- ▶ A disability rights group mentioned that many people are concerned that their needs may not be taken into account in post-COVID planning because they're currently staying at home due to underlying health conditions, and therefore may not be counted as essential riders

Employee Communications and Virtual Sessions

Overview

When the State of Washington declared a State of Emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Metro joined other county departments in acting quickly to stand up an Incident Management Team structure for decision-making and to integrate with the Executive's Crisis Response Team structure. We established a communications core team to coordinate rollout of centrally-led communications, design and craft internal and external communications, and assure proper review and approval by the Executive's Crisis Response Team prior to distribution of any internal or external communications.

Core to Metro's culture is a commitment to transparent decision-making, supportive communication that connects and is responsive to employees, and facilitation of employee engagement to inform decisions as appropriate. In response to the pandemic, the Partnerships and Engagement team in the General Manager's office has brought their skills to bear in:

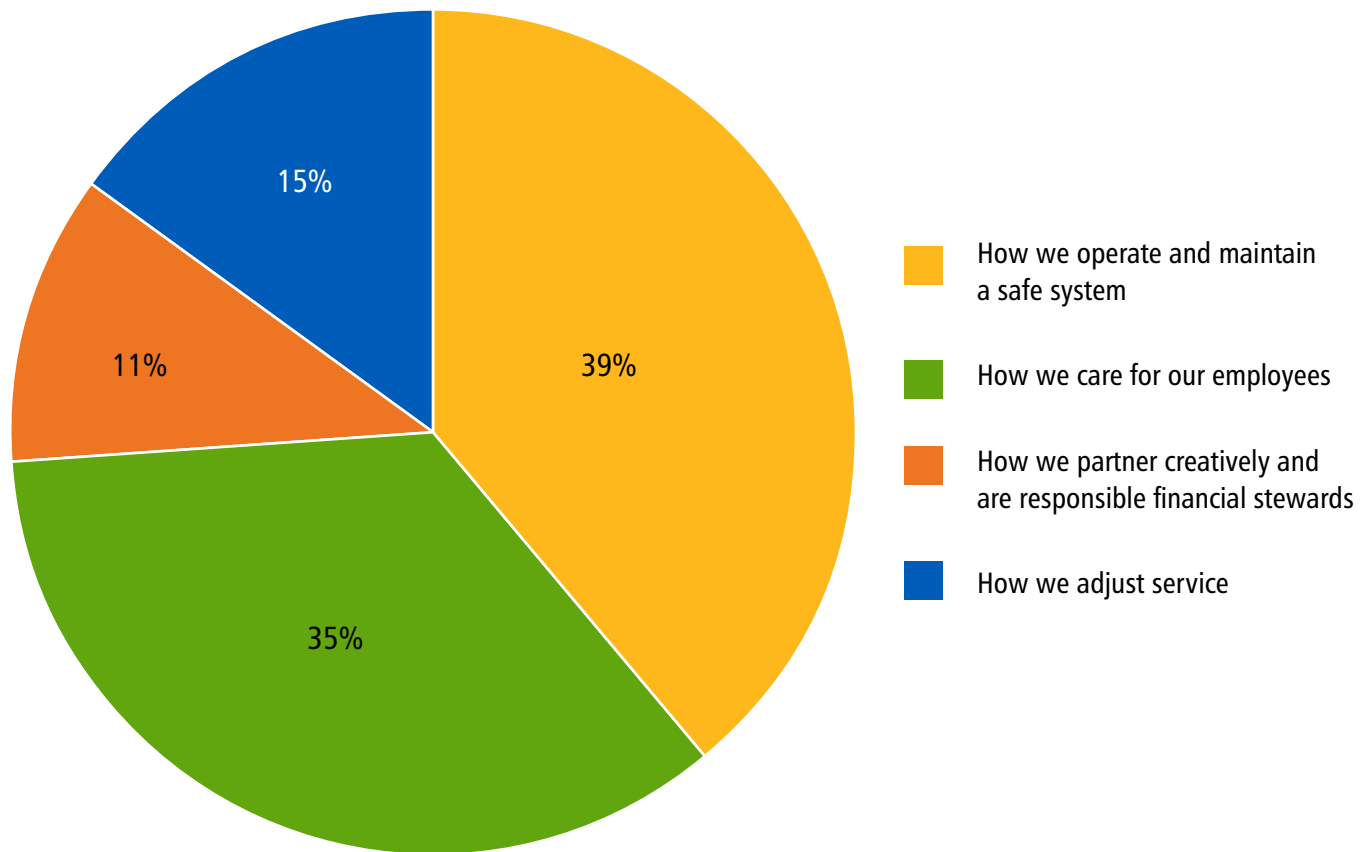
- ▶ assuring consistent, frequent communication from the top to frontline employees
- ▶ supporting and developing leaders throughout the organization in leading through a crisis
- ▶ providing space in virtual listening sessions for employees to speak directly and channel their concerns and ideas to leaders and task forces (that have been assembled to help Metro adapt in response to guidance from Public Health)

The following table outlines the channels and methods of communication we established and content we've shared from the beginning from our response to the pandemic.

Activity	Purpose	Type	Frequency	Reach
GM all-staff messages (email, poster)	Keep Metro staff informed of latest COVID-related policies, procedures, paid leave options, PPE, and news from the Executive's Office. These messages are also shared with labor leaders	Electronic, print	Daily (weekdays)	Approx. 3,500 employees
Division director echo messages	Echo messages are tailored for specific divisions. They are critical in crisis communications, because people tend to believe and act on the information shared when it comes from multiple, trusted sources	Electronic, print, verbally shared in meetings	Written echo messages: approximately 2X a month; verbally shared and discussed in weekly meetings and division listening sessions	Varies by division
Operations bulletins	Provide bus operators with relevant news, policies, procedures, paid leave options, and PPE; echo messages from Metro GM and Metro Deputy GM	Print	Daily (weekdays), then 2X a week	Approx. 3,100 bus operators
Employee Listening & Sharing sessions	Provide employees with direct access to leaders to ask questions, share concerns, and elevate issues	Meeting	Approx. 10–12 sessions per week	7–371 participants (depending on division, time of day)
Convene "Speak, Listen, Communicate" base representatives	Provide select group of bus operators who are considered "influencers" an opportunity to share concerns, ideas, feedback	Meeting	As needed	Seven operators (one rep from each base)
Leader Check-ins	Provide chiefs, supervisors, and other leaders a chance to talk directly to the Deputy GM and managers	Meeting	2X weekly	30–170 participants
Manager Toolkits	Provide talking points, FAQs, and communications support to managers to assure consistent messaging and facilitation tools for supporting employees	Print	As needed	Approx. 65 Extended Management Group members
Employee handouts, materials	Provide resources and consistent messaging regarding safety policies/ recommendations, HR materials, paid leave options, and public health messaging	Electronic, print	As needed	Delivered to approx. 6,000 employees

Appendix B

COVID-19 Response and Recovery Report: Actions Detail



How we operate and maintain a safe system during COVID-19

- ▶ Remove single seats on streetcars to improve social distancing
- ▶ Set load capacity for coaches; establish procedure to manage excess passenger loads
- ▶ Rear-door boarding and suspension of fare collection
- ▶ Resuming fare collection
- ▶ Access social distancing and remote vehicle cleaning
- ▶ COVID-related public information campaign
- ▶ Electronic signage on Metro Buses
- ▶ Establish social distancing guidelines for King County Vanpool participants
- ▶ Health, Safety, & Return to Transit Campaign
- ▶ Implement PA announcements on Link light rail and Seattle Streetcar
- ▶ Implement public-facing COVID dashboard
- ▶ Mask distribution and enforcement on Metro Services
- ▶ Public messaging to discourage non-essential travel

- ▶ Social distancing signage attached to seats throughout Metro-operated vehicles
- ▶ Installation of safety straps
- ▶ Strongly urge usage of masks for transit customers
- ▶ Transit stops physical distancing guidelines
- ▶ Approval of operator partitions to limit potential operator and customer exposure to COVID-19 in our active bus service fleet
- ▶ Community Van safety partitions
- ▶ Automated temperature screening kiosk procurement and formation of Health Screening Task Force
- ▶ Windows to remain open on all modes of transit
- ▶ Discontinue overnight security deployment
- ▶ Immediate mitigations to address crowding/at-risk riders on our system
- ▶ Night service security plan
- ▶ Increase current load capacity limits as King County progresses through Phases 3 and 4
- ▶ Plan for reopening customer-facing outlets
- ▶ Provision of optional face shield and safety glasses to operators for eye protection
- ▶ Surgical mask provision to frontline personnel
- ▶ Distribution of individual PPE kits to frontline staff at start of the crisis
- ▶ Use of virex with paper towels as an alternative to disinfecting wipes
- ▶ Distribute disposable masks to operators who are operating buses that do not have a partition
- ▶ FTA fabric masks and distribution
- ▶ Mask enforcement for employees
- ▶ Automated health screening program
- ▶ Closure of Quiet Rooms at all Metro properties
- ▶ Closure of workout facilities at all Metro properties
- ▶ Plan to reopen the King Street Pass Sales Office
- ▶ Reopening customer-facing outlets (i.e. Street Team)
- ▶ Transitioning teleworking employees back to the workplace before end of telecommuting
- ▶ Controls to limit potential employee exposure to COVID-19 at operating base dispatch windows
- ▶ Disinfection response team guidelines
- ▶ Emergency implementation of in-house drug & alcohol testing
- ▶ Fall 2020 bus operator pick via absentee process
- ▶ Mandatory employee health screenings and dedicated project manager
- ▶ Metro Roadeo cancellation

How we care for our employees

- ▶ Employee communications & engagement—virtual meetings
- ▶ Metro-specific addendum to the King County's Guidance for Workforce, Operations, and Customer Service Recovery
- ▶ Communicating notification and cleaning
- ▶ Establish a Metro-specific process to centrally administer various COVID-19 related leaves (in order to maximize benefit to individual employees)
- ▶ Temporarily accept direct donations of goods
- ▶ Distribution of masks on Via to Transit
- ▶ Mandated safety equipment policy
- ▶ Notice of decision made: fabric face covering supply chain and ordering
- ▶ Provision and use of fabric masks for frontline personnel

How we partner creatively and are responsible financial stewards

- ▶ Billing schools during reduced service period and rate increase for 2020–21 school year
- ▶ Suspension of incentives and disincentives for MT Transportation paratransit service contract
- ▶ Billing service partners during reduced service period
- ▶ Business Program revenue smoothing proposal
- ▶ KCM Access contractor rate adjustment
- ▶ Month-to-month extension to KCM Access contractor rate adjustment
- ▶ Monthly pass refunds
- ▶ Short-term Business Account and Vanpool mitigation
- ▶ Refugee Artisan Initiative cloth mask production
- ▶ Wildwood distillery to produce and distribute over 600 gallons of hand sanitizer
- ▶ Face shield donation from Flukes Manufacturing

How we adjust service to respond to COVID-19

- ▶ Capacity Increases for revenue vehicles during reopening Phases 2 and 3
- ▶ COVID-19 Food Delivery program
- ▶ Sept 2020 ramp up/down scenario update
- ▶ DART changes with service reduction
- ▶ Further reduce weekend (effective 4/18) and weekday (effective 4/20) service
- ▶ Postponement of Trailhead Direct
- ▶ Reduce system to Saturday network/weekday schedule with “B” cuts on Monday, April 6th
- ▶ Water Taxi service reductions
- ▶ Move Atlantic Base back to A cuts (w/o route 47) and restore A Line to full service; return the route 180 to only A cuts to support social distancing
- ▶ Summer 2020 Metro service addback priorities
- ▶ Transportation for pandemic response
- ▶ Vanpool ridership requirements exception
- ▶ VIA to Transit relaunch
- ▶ Cancel summer 2020 season for Trailhead Direct



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Moving forward together