

# A new ORCA LIFT fare subsidy to make transit more affordable for those most in need

In mid-2020, Metro is planning to launch a new ORCA LIFT subsidy program. Eligible customers will receive a fully subsidized transit pass, good for one year of unlimited rides on Metro Transit services, at no cost to them. The rider can also load E-purse value to the card and pay reduced fares on other transit systems.

The program aims to increase mobility for tens of thousands of people in extreme poverty, enabling connections to services, employment, and education.

## Mobility is a human right

**Metro believes that cost should not be a barrier to riding transit** and currently offers reduced fares for seniors, people with disabilities, youth, and people with low incomes. In order to address the cost barrier for customers who can't afford these programs, the King County Council directed Metro to develop an income-based fare program to launch in 2020.

Engagement with community partners and customers helped shape the new subsidy. Through this effort, Metro learned about other barriers, including the level of service in communities and the accessibility of current reduced fare programs. This program will address the cost barriers that some riders face and is a step toward an integrated income-based fare structure. Metro will launch quickly, and apply rigorous evaluation to adapt and grow.

**Metro believes that cost should not be a barrier to riding transit**

### Who is eligible



People who earn 80% Federal Poverty Level or less



ROUGHLY 54K people in King County would be eligible in the startup year



Plan for expanded enrollment in subsequent years

### 80% Federal Poverty Level is



**\$9,992**  
for an adult



**\$20,600**  
for a family of four



## How Metro gathered feedback to shape the program

- A robust community engagement process
- Consultation with partner agencies
- Data and market research
- Guidance from academic and private sector experts



### Stakeholder Advisory Group

Included 31 diverse organizations, met 4 times



### Community conversations

With 118 people who have no or very low incomes, led by 6 community based organizations



### Online survey

300 respondents self-identified as having no or very low incomes

## Based on community feedback, Metro followed these guiding principles for the program:

- Center on the needs of customers
- Partner with human service agencies for enrollment, and outreach
- Strive for regional integration
- Ensure program and transit system sustainability
- Evaluate results, adapt, and grow

## Program elements

In the program's startup year (2020), eligibility would be limited to clients of state benefit programs that use the  $\leq 80\%$  FPL income threshold:

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) / State Family Assistance (SFA)
- Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)
- Aged, Blind, or Disabled Cash Assistance (ABD)
- Pregnant Women Assistance (PWA)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Housing & Essential Needs (HEN)

People who receive these benefits will be able to enroll at 17 offices around King County. At the launch, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Public Health - Seattle & King County, and Catholic Community Services will enroll clients and provide them with the annual (and renewable) pass on an ORCA LIFT or Regional Reduced Fare Permit (RRFP) card.

With support from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Evidence for Action initiative, Metro will apply a **rigorous and participatory evaluation** strategy. Evaluation data will be utilized to ensure equity and adjust processes as new technology is available to make the program easier to use and access.

Metro will work with partner human service agencies to co-design an **outreach strategy** that reaches people where they live and receive services. Marketing and educational materials will be designed to assure language and disability access, including transcreation.

At the launch, the pass will provide fully subsidized access to Metro and potentially Sound Transit services. Customers will need to add E-purse value to their card to ride on other transit systems, as the fare value does not transfer, but these other agencies can join the program in 2021.

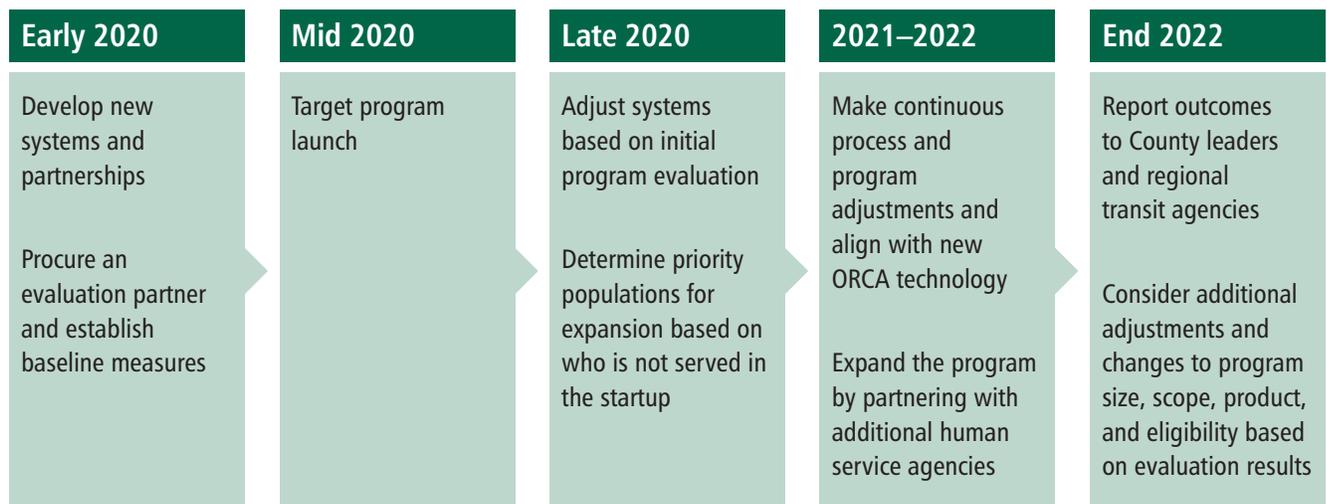
## Services included at launch

 <p><b>FULL SUBSIDY</b></p>	        
 <p><b>NO SUBSIDY: CUSTOMER PAYS WITH E-PURSE</b></p>	<p>LIFT RATE</p>    <p>FULL FARE</p>   
 <p><b>TO BE DETERMINED</b></p>	

## Estimated cost

- Roughly \$40 million per year. This includes the value of the fare subsidy, which Metro receives back in revenue.
- Actual (net) costs (dollars that could be invested in other priorities): roughly \$10 million per year; \$6 million in lost revenue and \$4 million in administrative costs.
- Consistent and sustainable funding is needed to maintain and grow the program. This will require ongoing conversations with County Council, the region, and the Legislature.

## How Metro will evaluate and continuously improve



### Additional information

For detailed information about the proposed program, see the Income-based Fare Program Implementation Plan and ORCA LIFT websites: [kingcounty.gov/metro/incomebasedfares](http://kingcounty.gov/metro/incomebasedfares) and [orcalift.com](http://orcalift.com)



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