



King County

Metro Fares Advisory Group Workshop #2

MEETING SUMMARY

April 4, 2017

King Street Center

DOT Director's Office Conference Room

201 South Jackson Street, Seattle

3:30 – 5:30 p.m.

Participants

- Aaron Morrow, King County Transit Advisory Commission
- Anne Eskridge, University of Washington, Transportation Services
- Arielle Washington, Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle
- August DeVries, Bellevue Downtown Association/TransManage
- Cliff Cawthon, Rainier Beach Action Coalition
- Daniel Heldring, Microsoft
- Daphne Pie, Public Health – Seattle King County
- Ezra Bason, Metro Transit operator
- Gail Gustavson, International Community Health Services
- Hester Serebrin, Transportation Choices Coalition
- Hillary Coleman, Seattle-King County Coalition on Homelessness
- Janelle Rothfolk, Catholic Community Services of King County
- Jeff Keever, Seattle Central College
- Katie Wilson, Transit Riders Union
- Kendle Bjelland, Commute Seattle

Absent

- Claire McDaniel, Sound Generations
- Hope Drumond, Alliance of People with disAbilities
- Karen Westling, Swedish – First Hill
- Kimberly Heymann, Alliance of People with disAbilities
- Rogelio Riojas, SeaMar

Welcome and introductions

Chris O'Claire, Assistant General Manager of Planning and Customer Services, King County Metro, welcomed the group and provided a brief recap of the last meeting and an overview of the purpose and content of this meeting.

DeAnna Martin, Community Relations Planner, King County DOT, introduced staff present and invited participants to introduce themselves. She reminded people of the group guidelines.

Background on Metro's actions to address affordability and access

Matt Hansen, Manager of Customer Communications & Services, King County Metro, provided an overview of actions Metro is currently taking to increase access to and affordability of transit. (See handout entitled, "Current Metro Activities to Improve Access and Affordability")

Matt shared that the first round of ORCA LIFT cards will expire this month. The cards will still be usable, but will revert to regular adult ORCA cards so users would end up being charged a regular adult fare. To notify users of the expiration, Metro has:

- Information on all buses to notify riders
- Posters up at all enrollment and ORCA retail locations
- Sent letters to all affected users
- Launched an online renewal process – 300 have already renewed
- Multi-lingual notices have also been produced and distributed to enrollment and retail locations
- The expiration date is also listed on the card itself

Meeting participants asked whether when people renew their ORCA LIFT card their balance can be transferred. The answer is it can. Participants also expressed interest in seeing and getting copies of the materials – posters, brochures – to help spread the message to their constituents.

Regarding a lack of knowledge about the availability of an ORCA day pass, many participants expressed their own lack of knowledge about this product. They asked several questions about how it can be used and where it can be purchased. Participants encouraged staff to make the day pass option more visible to customers perhaps even sending out a general announcement that this option exists. Staff promised to follow up with more detail about the pass, how it works, and how to purchase.

After sharing additional actions related to waving card fees, addressing youth ORCA card access when school is not in session, and college student transit affordability, participants had the following questions and comments:

- How has Metro done in reaching out to college students to increase ORCA LIFT enrollment? Answer: Metro did 14 outreach events at colleges in 2015; in 2016, Metro did 42; these outreach events are a focus.
- Do college freshman welcome packets, does it provide PH and Metro information? Answer: It depends on the school.
- Metro needs to do the ORCA LIFT materials in more languages
- Card replacement fee is a barrier; a \$5 expense for someone with low income is a big deal so getting rid of the fee is a great idea

Introduction to fare change options for zone/peak surcharges

Chris provided some general background on fares and goals of simplifying Metro's fares. Then, she presented five options Metro had developed to consider simplifying fares. (See handout entitled, "Metro Fare Options")

She shared that it's important for Metro to understand the current structure, based on the feedback from last meeting, and that our goal is to make sure transit is accessible to everyone. Fares need to recover 25-30% of the operating cost to provide the service, the rest comes from sales tax. Projecting how a fare change will affect ridership assumes that if fares go up there will be an adjustment to the supply and demand ratio. Metro's fares need to reflect the cost of service. Metro would like to learn from the group whether we have the right options and how we might mitigate any negative effects of any of the options. All of Metro's analyses are not complete at this moment, there is more work to do.

About all options – participants:

- Suggested increasing ORCA LIFT eligibility as a way to mitigate the effects on affordable access for those who would experience a fare increase.
- Wanted more detail on what the revenue increases and decreases meant in terms of service impacts or how additional revenue would be spent.
- Asked staff to consider the impacts on families – an increase in the adult fare would have an effect on the whole family when choosing to ride transit.

About Option B – a \$2.75 flat fare

Comments included:

- The increase in fare for off-peak riders could be mitigated by increasing the transfer window.
- This option has a good equity message to reduce geographic and historic inequities.
- Concern expressed about the brunt of the fare increase being born by the middle class.

About Option C – Local fare \$2.50, Express fare \$3.25

Comments included:

- How would Metro classify an express type service? – express really needs to be faster and fewer stops from a customer perspective.
- How does the RapidRide play a part?
- Deep concern expressed about “penalizing” people who live farther away from Seattle.
- Charging people more because they live far away from Seattle could hurt those who are poor and have to live far away because the cost of living is so high – include housing affordability, race, and class in an analysis of the options if possible.
- This option would introduce fare confusion and route confusion – customers would need to re-educated.
- Metro would need a really good explanation of the rationale for this type of fare structure.
- If this option is selected, make sure there is redundancy on the routes selected as Express – meaning a local option that people can pay a lower fare to ride
- There are advantages for operators on many levels; although this option would still lead to questions from riders.

About Option E – Peak Fare High (\$3.00)

Comments included:

- Both Options D and E seem to have the biggest effect on those who are most likely to be paying their fare with an employer-provided pass and would, therefore, be the least price sensitive.
- There would be operator issues in a logistical sense. Current peak pricing is based on the run (i.e. when the bus leaves the base). If the fare were to change in the middle the run, it seems difficult to implement. For example, there’s more involved than just the technology of the ORCA card reader. Operators manually place a fare card into the fare box.

Participants asked:

- Do these fare changes effect businesses?
- When would these changes occur? Answer: estimated at 2019 for this analysis
- Would Metro consider raising the youth age to 20?

Feedback, discussion of fare change options for zone/peak surcharges

Advisory group members were given a set of sticky dots to allocate to the fare options they preferred. The options were ranked in the following way:

1. Option B – flat fare \$2.75
2. Option A – flat fare \$2.50
3. Option E – peak fare high \$3.00
4. Option C – local fare \$2.50, express fare \$3.25
5. Option D – peak fare low \$2.75

In general discussion about the dot allocation, participants made the following comments:

- Concern expressed that now changes are being considered Access riders, yet fare changes are due. Whatever happens with Access riders, this needs to be consistent with Access fares and make sure it doesn't make it more difficult for riders to use both and transit between the two.
- What would happen with the fare revenue lost or gained?
- How is running the bus cheaper during the day compared to during the peak? Answer: Metro's fleet and operations system is based on operating the most service during heavy peak periods. This will flatten out over time as Metro moves more and more towards the Metro Connects Vision. It costs more to operate and maintain our peak service and we're at capacity now.
- Suggestion to charge around events or activities; on different days of the week – e.g. charge a higher fare for routes serving Capitol Hill during late night on Friday and Saturdays.

Sound Transit update

Chad Davis, from Sound Transit, provided a brief update on Sound Transit's fare-related planning effort. He explained that they would be going to their Board in the coming months to get approval and direction to move forward with their planning effort. If approved, planning and related public outreach would occur later this year or early in 2018.

Next steps

DeAnna provided a quick recap of the next steps in the process. Feedback from this meeting would inform a smaller set of options that Metro will be taking out to the broader public for their input. A second round of public engagement, including a second online survey and some public meetings, will take place in mid-April to early May. Outreach with community-based organizations is getting underway to conclude in mid-May. Metro expects to reconvene the advisory group for a third meeting in May once outreach is complete to inform the group of the adult fare change option they intend to recommend to the Executive and to share and get feedback from the group on longer term research and program efforts to address access and affordability and speeding up boarding.

Adjourn