

Regional Transit Task Force Summary of Meeting

**September 2, 2010, 5:30 – 8:30 p.m.
Mercer Island Community Center**

Task Force members present: Chuck Ayers, Gene Baxstrom*, Fred Butler, Suzette Cooke, Grant Degginger, Kevin Desmond*, Bob Drewel, Chris Eggen, David Freiboth, Noel Gerken, Carl Jackson, Rob Johnson, Josh Kavanagh, Jane Kuechle, Ed Miller, Estela Ortega, Tom Rasmussen, Carla Saulter, Jared Smith, Bob Swarner, Larry Yok

Task Force members absent: Shiv Batra, Chris Hoffmann, Kate Joncas, Steve Marshall, Lynn Moody, Tom Pierson, Jim Stanton, Ron Tober*, Liz Warman

Facilitator: John Howell (Cedar River Group)

I. Welcome

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 p.m. John Howell asked task force members and attendees to introduce themselves. He then reviewed the evening's agenda.

II. Service Reduction Scenarios and Criteria

At previous task force meetings members asked Metro to develop additional service reduction scenarios. Metro staff presented several different scenarios, including two "bookends" to illustrate the trade-offs of different policy choices.

"Bookend" scenarios (R0 and R2). Victor Obeso of Metro explained the new reduction scenarios (see presentation handout: "Discussion of RTTF Policy Guidance to Date: Comparison of System Reduction Scenarios"). One bookend scenario reduces service based solely on productivity, and the other reduces service based on current policy. Each reduces service by 400,000 hours, which Metro estimates will need to be cut, while also maximizing productivity. The R0 scenario maximizes productivity on a systemwide basis. Cutting the least productive routes across the system yields a productivity threshold of 14.9 riders per platform hour (i.e., the routes performing below that threshold would be eliminated). The R2 scenario maximizes productivity within each subarea while maintaining the current proportion of service by subarea: 17 percent in the East, 21 percent in the South and 62 percent in the West. It cuts 400,000 hours of the least productive service, but cuts different amounts from each subarea to maintain the current policy. These cuts yield a different productivity threshold in each subarea: 8.1 riders/platform hour in the East, 13.3 in the South and 23.2 in the West.

Both scenarios have trade-offs. Both eliminate much of the hourly service and service to low-density urban and to rural areas. Both would mean a significant loss of night service (in the East in R0 and in the West in R2). The productivity-only scenario (R0) affects fewer riders but cuts a much higher proportion of service in the East subarea. The current policy scenario (R2) eliminates an equal proportion of service in each subarea, but impacts more riders and has a lower overall productivity as measured by riders per platform hour).

Answers to Task Force members' questions:

* Non-voting member

- **Difference in need for hours cut:** Although the R0 scenario is more efficient than R2, that efficiency would not make much difference in the total number of hours that would need to be cut.
- **Difference in farebox impact:** The R2 scenario, because it results in a higher loss of riders, would cut farebox revenues somewhat more than the R0 scenario. Farebox is approximately 25 percent of Metro's revenues.
- **Integration with Sound Transit:** The R0 and R2 scenarios do not take full advantage of connections with Sound Transit and of network efficiency opportunities. Using productivity only might not result in eliminating a route that parallels Sound Transit, for example, and would not eliminate inefficient route tails (e.g. the ends of routes where ridership may be lower).

Task Force Discussion. There was general agreement that productivity should not be the sole policy basis for making service reductions. One task force member suggested that there might be other factors that would help to define productivity besides riders per platform hour.

R1 scenario with guidelines, and R3 scenario. When Metro presented the concept for service growth at the August 19th meeting, the task force liked the approach of using transparent guidelines to make service allocation decisions, and asked if Metro could present the conceptual guidelines the agency used to develop the R1 reduction scenario that the task force had discussed at the July 1st and 15th meetings. Mr. Obeso presented these conceptual guidelines (see slide 19), and noted that much work would need to be done before final guidelines would be proposed. The guidelines apply the task force's broad policy guidance of emphasizing productivity, given its link to economic development, land use and financial sustainability, and also addressing social and geographic equity. Mr. Obeso walked through the steps in developing the R1 scenario using the guidelines (see slide 21).

In addition, Metro developed an R3 scenario (see slide 22). Current county policy states that service reduction "shall be distributed among the sub areas in proportion to each sub areas's share of total service investment." There is no additional current policy direction for making service reductions. R3 is a revision of the R2 scenario (which uses the current service reduction policy). It begins by reducing service based on current policy, and then overlays the task force policy direction (productivity, because of it's connections to economic development, land use and financial sustainability, plus ensuring social equity and addressing geographic balance) and the conceptual guidelines used to develop the R1 scenario. Mr. Obeso compared productivity, subarea impacts and ridership of the R1 and R3 scenarios (slides 23 – 25).

Answers to Task Force members' questions:

- **R1 conceptual guidelines:** The conceptual guidelines that Metro used to develop the R1 service reduction scenario are more general than the guidelines Metro presented with the growth concept. The conceptual reduction guidelines were developed in July and Metro staff thinking has evolved as the task force work has progressed. Much more work would need to be done to create a proposed set of guidelines for public review and comment.
- **Current policy:** The current policy for reducing service is to do so on a subarea basis to end up with a 62-21-17 allocation. There are no guidelines about how to reach this end.
- **Cross-subarea routes:** Routes that travel between subareas are currently considered to be divided between the subareas involved to reach the 62-21-17 goal. This puts policy requirements on route design that might not make sense from a system perspective. Sometimes a route that takes Eastside riders to work in Seattle, for example, might have to be counted only in the East subarea if there aren't enough hours available for the West subarea. So the route would be run as a commuter route only, even if it made sense to offer all-day, two-way service.
- **Employment as a factor:** The conceptual guidelines presented for R1 are for transit coverage geared to population density, as measured in households per acre. Employment could also be

- **Guidelines and task force recommendations:** The guidelines discussed are examples; the concepts are evolving. It would take months to develop a set of guidelines and get review and comment from the County Council, County Executive and the public. So the task force will not see a proposed set of guidelines before making its final recommendations. However, the task force could provide policy guidance as to what should be in the guidelines, possibly as a statement of principles about the guidelines. For example, the task force could say that employment and economic development should be included in the guidelines.

Mr. Howell reminded the task force that the charge to the task force is to develop policy recommendations. To date, the task force has started to develop direction for both policy and for process (guidelines for planning the system, and performance measures to evaluate the system and suggest adjustments). The purpose of the scenarios is to illuminate what effect the task force's policy choices would have on the system, not to create a proposal for what the system should look like.

Task Force Discussion: The task force members made the following points regarding service reduction:

- Would like a written description that shows what the benefits are of taking a system view to plan service reductions or growth, rather than strictly allocating by subareas, per current policy.
- Seeing the bookend scenarios was helpful to understand the policy choices. It provided a level of confidence about the choices the task force is making, and showed how transit planners use policy guidance to design a system.
- Using service planning guidelines in order to be transparent is a good approach. More people are likely to support the decisions if they understand how they are made.
- The service planning guidelines need to be objective, specific and measurable. The guidelines Metro presented with the growth concept were better in this regard.
- The R1 scenario is the right solution, and that a geographic approach would only constrain the system, since as noted in slide 15, the geographic subareas do not follow or determine transportation patterns or mobility needs.
- The R1 scenario reflects the task force's guidance, and seems to be the most fair.
- The R1 scenario needs to acknowledge that one of the considerations in adjusting service from a productivity-only reduction is fairness. Productivity alone would have had a bigger negative impact on the East subarea.
- R1 needs more specificity about how it takes into account geography and social equity. Need to be clear about what these mean. In the growth scenario, the only guideline addressing social equity was about low-income communities. But the ability to drive because of age (seniors and youth), and disability also need to be part of social equity.
- R1 is too vague in the wording "address social equity and geographic balance." We need to be clear about what these terms mean.
- Comfortable with R1 or R2, but not R0 or R3.
- Not prepared to OK the R1 direction yet, but don't see any red flags.
- Need to factor in the Growth Management Act and growth planning, even for a reduction scenario. There are some areas of the county that are growing. Also, we need to be poised for growth when the economy changes.
- Would like more information on how the scenarios translate to real routes. There is a general sense in the public that Seattle gets all the service. The transparency in how decisions are made is very important. We also need to show how Metro is serving the whole county.

- The guidelines for reducing service and for growing it should include the same factors, such as density, economic development, productivity, social equity. There is more complexity in reducing pieces of a system in a workable way than in growing the system as a whole.

With regard to addressing growth even in a reduction scenario, Mr. Obeso noted that this can be addressed through guidelines. A guideline could be, for example, that even in a lower populated area of the county (less productive route), the route would be maintained if the area is growing.

Mr. Howell summarized the discussion by saying that most task force members support the broad policy direction for service reduction, but want to have further discussion about geographic balance and social equity. Task force members like the transparency in the development of guidelines and performance measures, and would like to see statement of principles that shape the guidelines.

III. Emerging Consensus on Potential Service Additions

Mr. Howell briefly reviewed the discussion from the August 5th meeting about the growth concept (see slides 28 – 34), and the consensus that is emerging. He said that at the conclusion of that meeting the task force expressed the desire to have further discussion about the meaning of the term geographic balance.

IV. Definition of Geographic Balance/Equity/Fairness

Mr. Howell summarized the two ways that the task force has talked about geographic balance so far (slides 36 and 37). In the discussion of performance measures, geographic equity was addressed in the statement: “Distribution and delivery of services, including fixed route bus service as well as other transit and ridesharing services, is appropriate to the land use and the market.” The August 5th presentation on service growth included several statements about geographic balance that are more operational, such as: “Local and hourly service targeted to areas with lower population density”; “Feeder services intended to connect communities to the transit network”; “Use lower cost options to better match demand”; and “Minimal or no fixed route service provided where route productivity is poor.”

Task Force Discussion: The task force members had the following comments about geographic balance/ equity/fairness:

- There is an important issue of fairness to consider. If we suggest a policy different from 40-40-20, we need to be sure that the fairness of the result will be clear to everyone.
- One piece of fairness is the balance between the revenue that a subarea generates and the service (benefit) it receives. If there is a perception by people in an area that they are not getting their money’s worth, they won’t support the changes.
- Revenues received/money spent should not be the primary guideline. An area that has certain kinds of businesses may generate a good deal of tax revenue but not have much density of population for transit service.
- How the subareas are defined is also important.
- Geographic equity might be treated more as a weighting factor than as a primary guideline for designing service.
- Geographic equity should provide service appropriate to the needs of the community, and support the land use and growth assumptions in Vision 2040, as stated on slide 31.
- The policy on geography should be consistent with the GMA planning.
- There needs to be a geographic reference point so that people will see that they will be part of the system and receive some of the service they are paying for. Just applying the GMA patterns could make the system out of proportion.

- The policy needs to have an overarching principle of fairness. Perhaps it's not strictly geographical. It's what Metro did in the R1 scenario in suggesting cuts in the system based on productivity, then looking at the results and making changes to provide service where it connects networks, or is the only service available, etc.
- Kevin Desmond suggested a different way to look at geographical fairness. Rather than "geographic equity," call it "geographic value" and describe it as having three parts:
 - The tax equity issue;
 - Economic development – serving the areas where the wealth of the community comes from (jobs, etc.); and
 - Productivity – no empty buses; putting the dollars where they will be best used.
 These three values could become the basis for transparent guidelines.
- Several task force members expressed support for this three-part "value" approach, but noted that it will need to be expressed succinctly and clearly, and perhaps with a dashboard to provide visible measures. One suggested expressing the concept at a high level in the plan for overall guidance.
- There is fear that without 40-40-20, some areas will lose service. The plan will need to have a very firm policy statement that *all cities* will have access to some form of transit services. Some cities are not tax generators and don't have a huge ridership but have a van service now that is full. Metro as a countywide service needs to serve the whole county.
- When thinking about being connected to transit service, it's important to include Sound Transit in that picture. It is part of public transit, also.
- Perhaps a better focus is on economic vitality, which is in everyone's interest. The community needs transit to get people to their jobs, education and medical services. This is essential to stabilize the economy and enable us to grow in a smart way in the future.

Mr. Howell summarized the discussion by suggesting that the concept of geographic value, with the three values described by Kevin, seemed to resonate with a number of task force members. He will have further discussions with task force members and staff and then will draft a definition statement for the task force's review.

V. Public Comment

John Niles

Mr. Niles has an independent consulting firm, Global Telematics. He was recently visiting central Mexico, which has fast intercity buses with WiFi access, well-used subways and an impressive bus rapid transit (BRT) system. He agrees with the idea raised at this task force meeting that there should be flexibility to make transit fit the needs of different areas. This flexibility needs to be tied to growth factors.

Mr. Niles stated that it will be important for service reduction scenarios to be detailed down to the route level so people can understand how the cuts will affect them. With respect to performance measures, he recommends the model of the Washington State Department of Transportation's "gray notebook," a quarterly collection of performance measurement data. It is important to provide performance measurement reports to the public on a regular basis.

Madeleine McKenna

Ms. McKenna is the President of the Associated Students of the University of Washington (ASUW). Of the 42,000 UW students, 72 percent have opted into the U-Pass program. U-Pass holders are 10 percent of Metro's riders. They made 10 million trips on Metro in 2008 alone, saving nearly 30 million vehicle miles and thousands of tons of CO2 emissions. Due to the rising program costs for U-Pass, the university and ASUW decided to ask all students to pay into the program.

ASUW would like to work with the task force and Metro to emphasize the importance of maintaining the transportation routes that connect UW students to the region. The Seattle UW campus is overwhelmingly a “commuter campus.” Ms. McKenna thanked the task force for considering the students’ needs.

Doug McDonald

Mr. McDonald noted that underlying the task force’s discussion is the question of why Metro is important and who pays for it. He suggested that it is groups such as the U-Pass program and major employers and institutions (colleges, hospitals, etc.) who will be crucial to support Metro in the future. If Metro’s services do not support employment centers or have too high a cost for employers, it will be difficult for Metro to find both the financial and community support it needs.

VI. Next Steps

Mr. Howell noted that several topics that were not addressed at this meeting will need to be held to the next meeting, which is on September 16. These topics include:

- discussion of service restoration,
- reviewing a draft policy statement on geographic balance/fairness/value, and
- discussing the definition of social equity.

Other topics that need to be discussed at the next meeting include:

- potential funding strategies;
- the JTC’s work in developing a blueprint for public transportation across the state, which Gene Baxstrom would like to share with the task force,
- an update on revenues expected from sales taxes, and
- draft policy statements on cost control from the Cost Control/Efficiencies Subgroup.

Given the number of topics for the next meeting, Mr. Howell would like to schedule the meeting to end at 9:00 p.m. instead of 8:30 p.m.

A task force member requested that a schedule be created that describes the steps and the key decision points at the county and the state level after the task force has completed its work.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:34 p.m.