

Regional Transit Task Force Summary of Meeting

**June 17, 2010, 5:30 – 9:00 PM
Mercer Island Community Center**

Task Force members present: Fred Butler, Grant Degginger, Kevin Desmond*, Bob Drewel, Chris Eggen, David Freiboth, Chris Hoffmann, Carl Jackson, Kate Joncas, Josh Kavanagh, Steve Marshall, Ed Miller, Estela Ortega, Tom Rasmussen, Carla Saulter, Jared Smith, Jim Stanton, Bob Swarner, Ron Tober*

Task Force members absent: Chuck Ayers, Shiv Batra, Gene Baxstrom*, Suzette Cooke, Noel Gerken, Rob Johnson, James Kelly, Jane Kuechle, Lynn Moody, Tom Pierson, Liz Warman, Larry Yok

Facilitator: John Howell (Cedar River Group)

I. Welcome

The meeting was called to order at 5:34 p.m. John Howell welcomed Bob Swarner as a new member of the Regional Transit Task Force. Mr. Swarner replaces Sue Blazek, who has been unable to attend meetings because of health concerns. Mr. Swarner is a South King County resident and transit rider of bus and light rail. He works for King County Wastewater Treatment Division. Mr. Howell asked the other asked task force members and attendees to introduce themselves.

Mr. Howell reviewed the evening's agenda.

II. Report on Initial Subgroup Meetings

The task force has formed two subgroups to delve in more depth into two subject areas, and bring information and recommendations back to the task force as a whole. Both subgroups have met since the last task force meeting. Written summaries of these meetings will be forthcoming. Mr. Howell summarized their discussions so far, as follows.

Cost Control/Efficiency Subgroup

This subgroup reviewed two documents that Metro had previously provided to the County Council and County Executive: one on Metro's budget and the implications of cost reduction, and the other (presented at a prior task force meeting) on the findings of the County Auditor and Metro's response.

The subgroup identified four categories of potential cost control to focus on: (1) process improvements; (2) reducing the growth of wage and benefit costs; (3) reducing the growth of nondirect service costs; and (4) improving bus service productivity. The subgroup discussed fixed route service costs, and agreed that there is some overlap with the performance measures subgroup on this topic. There was discussion about wages and benefits. It was noted that wages and benefits comprise 65% of Metro's operating budget. The subgroup members agreed that its charge is not to review or comment on Metro's labor negotiations. The subgroup also wanted a better understanding of the range of constraints that might affect efficiency measures. There was also some discussion about the success Metro has had in creating greater bus service efficiencies through its route restructuring efforts.

* Non-voting member

The subgroup identified six topics for further discussion at its upcoming meetings:

- The rationale/method for the overhead charges from King County.
- Opportunities and constraints for alternative service delivery models.
- The potential to deliver services with a managed competition model.
- Getting a better understanding of key constraints to potential efficiencies.
- Opportunities for additional route restructuring.
- Federal and state laws on paratransit services.

Answers to Task Force members' questions:

- *Labor contracts:* There is a tension between understanding the constraints that may be connected with labor contracts, and getting into the details of collective bargaining. The subgroup's main interest is in understanding the constraints that might affect the ability to create additional cost controls and alternative service delivery models.

Performance Measure Subgroup

This subgroup held its first meeting earlier today. They are looking at creating a system of performance measures that can be used by Metro, policy makers and the public to assess Metro services. They are organizing their work into three parts:

- Identifying a set of reporting measures on basic services that Metro provides, looking especially at the sources and uses of revenue and how revenue streams relate to the different types of Metro services.
- Creating specific performance measurements for each type of Metro service. These would include measurements for fixed route services (high ridership, commuter and local) and for other services (van pools, DART, partnership services).
- Establish "Target" and "Results" performance metrics for the six key transit design factors that the County Council has asked the task force to consider.

The subgroup reviewed an article regarding transit performance measures in Denver and plans to look at how Spokane Transit approaches performance measures. Spokane, in particular, is considered to be using best practices. The subgroup also discussed adding another design factor to the list of six that the County Council charged the task force with considering. The new design factor is environmental sustainability and quality. Environmental justice, which is one of the existing six design factors, is not usually understood to include environmental sustainability.

Mr. Howell reminded the task force that both subgroup meetings are open to any task force member. He will notify the task force of the next meeting dates for both subgroups.

III. Explanation of Service Scenarios

David Hull of Metro presented a discussion guide handout with four service scenarios: (1) high productivity corridors, (2) all-day mobility, (3) congestion relief, and (4) geographic distribution. The chart describes the emphasis of each scenario, and how it would be expanded in a growth period and be reduced in a retrenchment period. The chart also shows how well each scenario supports the six transit design factors.

- *High productivity* – This scenario provides high levels of service in a condensed footprint, thus serving the most people possible. Service in lower density and rural areas would focus more on van pools, ride matching and other services. It strongly supports the land use and productivity/efficiency design factors, and also supports social equity and financial stability.

- *All-day mobility* – This scenario provides local bus routes for a 12- to 18-hour span of service, and would get high ridership and broad geographic coverage. It would take the fewest buses to operate. At peak periods the local routes would be supplemented with van pools. It strongly supports the geographic equity, land use and productivity/efficiency design factors.
- *Congestion relief* – This scenario focuses on getting people out of cars, especially for commuters. It emphasizes park-and-ride service and serving major employment centers. It would provide less service in low density areas. It is probably the most expensive to operate because of the number of buses needed during peak hours and the need to deadhead buses (run one way without passengers). It ranks in the moderate range in terms of supporting each of the six design factors.
- *Geographic distribution* – This scenario provides many local routes, which may be policy-based rather than demand based. It is a blend of productivity, all-day mobility and congestion relief. It strongly supports geographic equity, and is moderately supportive of the other factors except for land use.

Answers to Task Force members' questions:

- *Current service:* David Hull suggested that the closest scenario to today's service may be the geographic distribution scenario, but Metro also pays attention to productivity and social equity factors. In terms of Metro's budget, the overwhelming amount of funding goes to fixed route services. Approximately 75 percent of the budget goes to high ridership services. Metro has sharper peaks of rush hour service to base ridership service than do its peers, partly because the service began with an emphasis on getting people to work.
- *Financial stability:* The two scenarios that best support this design factor would be high productivity corridors and all-day mobility. Both scenarios have more riders and better farebox return.
- *Environmental sustainability:* Assessing the scenarios in terms of this factor is complicated because of the many elements involved. The congestion relief strategy might be the best in terms of BTUs removed (by taking cars off the road), but there are also energy savings from the all-day mobility and high productivity scenarios, because ridership would be higher.
- *Ratings:* The ratings for each scenario on their level of support for the six transit design factors are subjective. They focus mostly on the services Metro provides or would provide in each scenario. The services of other transit agencies, such as Sound Transit, would come into play to fill some gaps.

IV. Small Group Discussion of Service Scenarios

The task force divided into two small groups to discuss the scenarios. Mr. Howell asked each group member to prioritize the four scenarios, and to weight each one. The group facilitators then averaged these responses for each group, and reported back to the full task force.

Group 1 report

John Resha facilitated and reported back for this group. In general, the group thought that Metro's current services do a fairly good job of balancing important features from all four scenarios. The group saw a strong linkage between the design factors of productivity and land use. The group also talked about the connection between social equity and workforce development through education. That is, transit is crucial to many residents in order to attend institutions of higher learning to get the skills and/or training they need for the work force.

Group 1's ranking and weighting of the scenarios are shown in the table below. After the rankings, Group 1 conducted a "lightning round" on the importance of the design factors. Financial stability and productivity (combined with land use) were the most frequent choices of the group members for the most important and the second most important factor.

Group 2 report

John Howell facilitated and reported for this group. This group agreed that the scenarios are a little artificial—no one scenario would be the best way to design a transit system. They thought that the current system is a combination of the high productivity corridors and geographic distribution. They noted that congestion relief has the potential for wide public support, and may offer potential for pricing strategies to gain additional service, such as a paid park-and-ride. They did not completely agree with the handout's rankings of scenarios on the design factors of social equity and geographic distribution. The group also talked about the need to match the service with the market.

Small Groups' Ranking and Weighting of Transit Scenarios

Transit Scenario	Avg Rank – Group 1	Avg Rank – Group 2	Weighting – Group 1	Weighting – Group 2
High Productivity Corridors	1	1.4	40%	51.1%
All-Day Mobility	2.5	2.4	25%	22.1%
Congestion Relief	4	2.9	7%	12.9%
Geographic Distribution	2.5	3.4	18%	13.8%

Mr. Howell noted that both groups gave the highest rank and most weight to high productivity and all-day mobility. He suggested that a next step could be to use the results of this conversation to create one or more detailed scenarios to show what possible service additions and service reductions might look like.

V. Discussion of Small Group Work and Scenarios

Scenarios for growth or service reduction. There was discussion about whether the expanded scenarios that Mr. Howell suggested Metro would produce should be for growth or for service reduction, and whether they should focus on revenues and costs. Mr. Desmond suggested on the growth side, looking at how the system would develop in 10 years based on Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC)'s assumptions about regional growth. With respect to service reductions, Metro's worst case service reduction would cut 600,000 hours of existing service by 2015, so he suggested looking at a cut of 400,000 hours. To the extent that there could be budget savings identified, the number of hours cut would be reduced, or, in growth mode, the growth could occur faster. Suggestions from task force members included: looking first at a time of contraction and what the resulting system would look like; looking at fares; and including multimodal opportunities and Sound Transit as part of the scenario. Mr. Desmond noted that Sound Transit has different funding sources and is not facing the same revenue challenges as Metro. So Sound Transit's service in the scenarios would be stable. A reduction scenario could, however, include reducing service in places that Sound Transit also serves.

A number of task force members expressed concern that expansion and contraction of the system are fundamentally different questions. One task force member said, for example, that while he supports 40-40-20 for expansion of the system, he would be concerned about the reverse for cuts, since that would put 62 percent of the cuts in the west where there are strong economic and job centers. When cutting, Metro should look to preserve what they do well—moving the most people. Another member said that land use didn't rank high for him when thinking of a reduction mode, but would be key in a growth mode. Some task force members said they had approached the small group exercise and ranking with the assumption of making cuts. Others said they were assuming an ideal case, i.e., growth opportunities. Given the current funding challenges, several task force members urged that the task force focus on scenarios for contraction and on all opportunities for cost savings. Another suggestion was to look also at a third time frame—a period of restoration that can help to move toward growth.

Cost containment and the task force's charge. A number of members suggested that the task force should focus on efficiencies and cost containment, at least initially. The focus should be on figuring out how to retain service and the integrity of the system by maximizing efficiencies. Mr. Howell pointed out that the purpose of having subgroups is to be efficient with everyone's time, and to enable several streams of discussion to occur simultaneously, given the short timeline the task force has in which to develop its recommendations. The subgroups are open to any task force member. Their conclusions will come back to the full task force for discussion and decisions on any recommendations.

Several task force members expressed concern that the task force seems still to be figuring out its purpose. As a refresher, Mr. Desmond read the task force's charge from the County Council. It includes (1) considering whether there should be changes to the vision and mission of the King County transit system; (2) developing criteria for systematically growing the transit system; (3) developing criteria for systematically reducing the transit system; (4) strategies for increasing efficiency; and (5) a state and federal legislative agenda to achieve the vision. The task force's meetings so far have worked on the first four parts of the task force's charge. There was a request to update the schedule to incorporate the work of the sub groups. Mr. Howell said that the task force work is still relatively on-track with the original schedule that outlines broad steps for getting to agreement on recommendations. However, he said he would provide an update to that schedule.

A task force member suggested that the task force first work on cost control and productivity enhancements with the specific goal of not hurting the region's economy, since the economic downturn is the root cause of Metro's funding challenges. Then, the task force should look at growth in line with the Transportation 2040 plan of the region, as developed by PSRC. Mr. Desmond suggested that the County Council's intent was that the task force look at policy issues. So rather than going into detail to suggest cuts to particular budget items, the task force might make recommendations that certain budget areas be addressed, or recommend approaches such as alternative service delivery models or building partnerships. Several task force members said that their interest in looking at cost containment is to enable the task force members to fully support Metro in advocating for what the agency needs from the County Council and the legislature.

There was a suggestion that Metro bring proposals for the task force to discuss regarding cost containment, performance measurement and potential service reductions.

Mr. Howell will meet with the Metro and county staff team the next day to consider the most productive next steps for the task force and the topics for the next meeting. He will communicate back to the task force early next week. Also, he will set up the next meetings for the two subgroups.

VI. Public Comment

No one among the members of the public present requested time to comment.

VII. Next Meeting

The task force's next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, July 1, from 5:30 to 9:00 p.m. It will be held again at the Mercer Island Community Center.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.