

**Regional Transit Task Force
Summary of Meeting**

**March 10, 2011, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Mercer Island Community Center**

Task Force members present: Shiv Batra, Gene Baxstrom*, Suzette Cooke, Grant Degginger, Kevin Desmond, Chris Eggen, David Freiboth, Kate Joncas, Josh Kavanagh, Jane Kuechle, Ed Miller, Lynn Moody, Tom Rasmussen, Jim Stanton, Bob Swarner, Larry Yok

Task Force members absent: Chuck Ayers, Fred Butler, Bob Drewel, Noel Gerken, Chris Hoffmann, Carl Jackson, Rob Johnson, Steve Marshall, Estela Ortega, Tom Pierson, Carla Saulter, Jared Smith, Greg Walker*, Liz Warman

Others present: King County Executive Dow Constantine and Councilmember Larry Phillips

Facilitator: John Howell (Cedar River Group)

I. Welcome and Agenda Review

The meeting was called to order at 6:12 p.m. John Howell asked task force members and attendees to introduce themselves.

Mr. Howell explained that this meeting is in response to the task force's request last fall for Metro staff to report on how the task force's recommendations influenced the proposed Strategic Plan and Service Guidelines. The task force's work is complete, so there is no action to be taken at this meeting. The purpose is to share information and hear reactions.

II. Task Force Recognition

King County Executive Dow Constantine expressed his thanks to the task force for a job well done. He also congratulated the task force for achieving the Municipal League's recognition with the 2011 James R. Ellis Regional Leadership Award. Task force members did an excellent job of both representing the interests of their constituencies, and the interests of King County residents as a whole. The task force's work has laid the foundation for the future of transit in King County.

Councilmember Larry Phillips also thanked the task force members. In recent discussions with legislators about transportation issues, it has been very helpful to have regional leaders speaking with one voice through the task force's report and recommendations. The Strategic Plan that the County Council will consider reflects a great deal of the task force's work. Councilmember Phillips also noted that Councilmember Jane Hague sent her thanks and appreciation to the task force.

III. Review Strategic Plan and Guidelines

Updates – Kevin Desmond

Metro staff used the task force's recommendations to develop the *Strategic Plan for Public Transportation 2011 – 2010*. The Strategic Plan is now before the County Council, and is undergoing review and comment by the Regional Transit Committee (RTC) and the public. The Strategic Plan and Service Guidelines are intended to set the direction for Metro Transit for the next 10 years.

* Non-voting member

Mr. Desmond highlighted some key developments since last fall when the task force concluded its work. The Amalgamated Transit Workers Union contributed to the solution by agreeing to a wage freeze and suspension of cost of living adjustment for this year. The labor agreement is the equivalent of almost 200,000 hours of transit service between now and 2013. Kevin thanked the Executive, Council and Union for their work on the labor agreement. Metro has continued implementing steps recommended in the Auditor's Office report, which have resulted in meaningful savings. Ridership is starting to increase, perhaps reflecting increased economic activity. On the downside, the price of diesel fuel has risen 60 cents per gallon since January.

Metro staff have been conducting outreach with local jurisdictions about the Strategic Plan, and have offered to meet with any interested city council or staff. The RTC has added two meetings to its schedule in order to have sufficient time to examine the Strategic Plan. Their review process also includes opportunities for public comment. They expect to complete their review by June.

Strategic Plan and Service Guidelines – Victor Obeso

Mr. Obeso summarized the planning process and explained what is included in the Strategic Plan and Service Guidelines. (See PowerPoint presentation, "Strategic Plan for Public Transportation, 2011 – 2021.") The complete plan and an executive summary are available online. Metro's web site also includes a form for members of the public to comment. One difference from the task force recommendations is on the service groupings for measurement of route and system productivity. The task force had recommended measuring routes by service family (i.e. Frequent Arterial, Peak Commuter, Local, and Hourly services). However, upon reviewing the data, the staff decided that it made more sense to use two groupings: Seattle core routes (serving downtown Seattle and the University District), and routes that do not serve the Seattle core. Routes would be compared to other routes in the same category.

As Metro staff make presentations about the Strategic Plan, much of the conversation centers on the Service Guidelines, since these will shape how Metro expands or reduces service. Currently Metro faces having to cut 400,000 hours of service by 2013 unless there is a significant change in revenue. When the task force last met, Metro expected to need to cut 600,000 hours, but the new labor agreement has reduced needed cuts by 200,000 hours.

Responses to Questions from the Task Force

- *Comparison to 40-40-20:* The new guidelines are more complex to use than the 40-40-20 policy, but they provide a better way to examine the effects of changes in bus route productivity, job and population growth, and demographic trends. As a package, the guidelines are more rational than the prior policy.
- *Implementation date:* The guidelines are part of the Strategic Plan. When that plan is adopted, the guidelines will go into effect as the policy. The expected adoption date is in the summer of 2011. The County budget process will occur in the fall of 2011. At that time it will become clear if Metro will need to reduce bus service in the 2012-13 biennium. If so, the service Guidelines will be used to make those decisions. The process for discussing potential service reductions would include development of scenarios showing how and where Metro would make the reductions.
- *Actions to address low-performing routes:* When low-performing routes are identified, the staff will look for any of a number of ways to increase their productivity. This could include reconfiguring the routes, changing to a different transit mode, or other solutions. Low productivity would not necessarily mean that the routes would be eliminated.
- *Partnerships and the guidelines:* The guidelines include three priorities: (1) improve overcrowded routes; (2) change underused routes to improve productivity; and (3) look for partnerships. These priorities hold whether Metro is growing or reducing service. If a partner could pay for at least 30

percent of the operating costs of a route or corridor, that route/corridor would move up in priority. There would not be a limit on partnerships as there was with the Transit Now program.

- *Households and jobs within ¼ mile of stops:* This is a measure of population and employment density, based on census parcel data and data from the Puget Sound Regional Council. The Strategic Plan includes threshold levels for these measures, and explains the scoring method for determining the appropriate frequency of service.
- *Performance measures and targets:* The performance measures in the Strategic Plan align with the plan's goals and objectives. The plan states what can be measured. In addition, Metro will be developing a performance reporting structure, which will include targets. In some cases there will be a number target. In other cases, particularly for measures not within Metro's control (such as mode share), the target will be to improve.
- *Service for people with limited transportation options:* The guidelines include two ways of considering this aspect of social equity: 1) identifying census tracts that are majority low-income populations and/or households of people of color, and 2) assessing routes based on the actual boardings in low-income and minority population census tracts.

Task force members also made several comments and suggestions for future presentations about the Strategic Plan and guidelines:

- Generally a good body of work that is consistent with the task force's recommendations.
- Clarify the context of the guidelines—They are the result of a countywide review process, and while they are complex, the results will be fairer and more transparent than the current 40-40-20 policy.
- Create a short and easy-to-understand presentation for non-policy audiences, including those with limited English. Keep in mind that people will want to know what will happen to *their* routes and bus stops. Consider developing a scenario that applies to the particular audience as a way of explaining performance measurement.
- A task force member expressed concern that budget cuts have included cuts in marketing. Marketing of routes is critical to attract new riders.

IV. Audit Implementation and Budget Progress Report

Jim Jacobson reported on Metro's implementation of the auditor's findings. (See PowerPoint presentation, "Performance Audit Update.") The Auditor's Office has nearly completed a one-year review, and will present a report on those findings to the County Council. Their written report is expected in April.

Responses to Questions from the Task Force

- *More efficient bus scheduling:* Metro has achieved \$12.5 million in efficiencies, but it would be difficult to reach the Auditor's estimated savings of \$16.7 million. Metro has already achieved the key metric that the auditor recommended for the ratio of layover to scheduled time. Metro is working with a committee of operators to review the scheduling changes and how they impact operators.
- *Paratransit service:* Metro's costs for the paratransit program have increased partly because the state has eliminated a program that served some of these riders.
- *Internal charges by other county agencies:* The County Executive has sent a clear message that agencies that assess internal charges are to conduct continuous quality improvement in order to reduce costs.
- *Auditor's recommendations not implemented so far:* Some of the auditor's recommendations involve difficult policy choices. For example, the auditor recommended eliminating transfers. However, this would represent a large fare increase for the very people who are the least able to

pay and the most dependent on transit. Another example is the recommendation to reduce paratransit service, which would reduce service for people who have no other transportation options.

- *Proposed car tab legislation:* This proposal would save approximately 250,000 hours of service. However, this revenue source would sunset in three years.

Task force members' comments and suggestions included the following:

- Where Metro has not achieved results to the level that the auditor projected, consider adding an explanation of why the level of results achieved is good and/or why additional savings is difficult to achieve.
- Itemize the auditor's recommendations that Metro *has* adopted.
- Metro should carry forward the work of the Efficiency Subgroup regarding its recommendations on the county's internal charge systems, since there appears to be a potential for some savings.

Materials Requested

The task force members were interested in receiving the following materials:

- The Auditor's update report, when it becomes available; and
- The schedule of upcoming RTC meetings.

The meeting adjourned at 8:07 p.m.