

Regional Transit Task Force Summary of Meeting

**March 30, 2010, 6:00 – 8:00 PM
Mercer Island Community Center**

Task Force members present: Shiv Batra, Gene Baxstrom*, Fred Butler, Suzette Cooke, Grant Degginger, Kevin Desmond*, Bob Drewel, Chris Eggen, David Freiboth, Noel Gerken, Chris Hoffmann, Carl Jackson, Rob Johnson, Kate Joncas, Josh Kavanagh, James Kelly, Jane Kuechle, Steve Marshall, Ed Miller, Lynn Moody, Estela Ortega, Tom Pierson, Tom Rasmussen, Carla Saulter, Jim Stanton, Jared Smith, Ron Tober*, Larry Yok

Task Force members absent: Chuck Ayers (sent John Mauro), Sue Blazak, Liz Warman (sent Rich White)

Facilitator: John Howell (Cedar River Group)

Purpose of the Task Force

Harold Taniguchi, Director of the King County Department of Transportation, convened the meeting and welcomed the task force members and guests. He thanked the task force members for their service to the County. Kevin Desmond, Metro Transit Division General Manager, reviewed the events that led to the formation of the Regional Transit Task Force. The national and global economic recession that started in 2008 has resulted in much lower than expected sales tax revenue to support Metro. In Fall 2008 Metro made an \$80 million cut in the 2008-09 budget. By February 2009, a new forecast showed that over five years (2009-13), there would be an estimated loss of \$700 million in sales tax revenue. Metro convened an advisory committee and stakeholder meetings to review service scenarios and consider tradeoffs. The resulting consensus 2010-11 budget, which the County Council passed, left service mostly intact for 2010-11. But the long-term structural loss in expected tax revenue remains.

In December 2009 the County Council established the Regional Transit Task Force with the purpose of reviewing short-term and long-term objectives for transit investment, considering funding options, identifying efficiencies, and crafting a consensus vision. The task force is to consider service in relation to six key factors for transit system design: land use, social equity, financial sustainability, geographic equity, economic development and productivity. In short, the task force is to think big, creatively and regionally. The task force is charged with developing a policy framework and recommendations to the County Executive and County Council by September 2010.

John Howell (Task Force Facilitator) added that at the next task force meeting, the County Executive and a member of the County Council will attend and task force members will have a chance for further discussion about their charge.

* Non-voting member

Agenda Review and Introductions

Mr. Howell explained the main purposes of this first meeting: to help the task force members start getting to know each other, to get background information about the task force's work, and to start coming to agreement on the ground rules under which the task force will operate. He asked task force members to introduce themselves, and briefly describe their key affiliations and the interests they bring to the task force's work.

The task force members come from communities across King County, and have a wide range of interests related to transit and transportation. These interests might be grouped into the following themes:

- Social equity – lower income families, communities of color, rural residents, persons with disabilities, transit-dependent residents
- Access to opportunity – housing, jobs, child care, education
- Financial sustainability – cost control, efficiency, sustainable long-term funding
- Economic growth, employment, transportation to all employment centers
- Geographic equity – maintaining or achieving good levels of service in all parts of the county
- Environmental issues – energy use, reducing climate impacts, alternative solutions for mobility
- Regional mobility – connectivity, multimodal options, seamless transportation system
- Effectiveness, collaboration – maximizing what we have, regional partnerships

Mr. Howell invited members of the audience to introduce themselves by name and affiliation, if any.

Draft Meeting Ground Rules

The draft ground rules for task force meetings had been distributed to task force members in advance. Mr. Howell reviewed the ground rules and then asked for comments and reactions. There was discussion about two ground rules: on taking public comment and on sending alternates to the task force meetings when a member is unable to attend.

Public testimony/comment. The proposed ground rule was as follows:

Ground Rule 7. *The task force does not plan to take formal public testimony. However, the task force may accept questions or comments from the public at the conclusion of meetings, as needed.*

Task force members noted that since transit is crucial in many people's lives, not allowing for public comment would run the risk of losing the respect of the public, and undermining the credibility of the task force's recommendations. There was discussion about the differences between taking public testimony and taking public comment, and which comment process is best in light of the task force's role as an advisory rather than a decision-making body. There were several suggestions for methods that could be used for taking public comment and questions.

- **Decision.** There was agreement among task force members that meetings should include some opportunity for the public to provide comment on the issues that are before the task force and on the task force's work.
- **Actions.** Mr. Howell will:
 - Revise the second sentence of the ground rule from "may accept" to "will accept" ("However, the task force will accept questions or comments from the public . . .")
 - Add that written comments from the public are also welcome and will be distributed to all task force members.
 - Consider options for arranging the meeting agenda to allow for a period for public comment at each meeting.
 - Look into the feasibility of posting public comments on the task force's Web site.

With respect to making meeting information available on the Web, Mr. Howell said that the meeting dates and agendas will be posted on the task force Web site in advance of meetings, and that the aim is to post meeting summaries approximately five days after each meeting.

Task force member alternates/proxies. The proposed ground rule was as follows:

***Ground Rule 8.** Task force members are strongly encouraged to participate in every meeting to achieve continuity in discussions from one meeting to the next. If members cannot attend a meeting it is his/her responsibility to be informed about the topics discussed by the next meeting. An absent member may ask someone to attend a meeting on their behalf to listen to the discussion, but that person will not be able to participate in discussions or votes.*

Task force members asked if there could be more flexibility in this ground rule. For example, if a task force member designated someone as an alternate and shared information and notes on an ongoing basis, whether that alternate could attend the meeting and vote on behalf of the task force member. In the discussion, task force members made the following points:

- Some task force members represent a broad or widespread constituency, so it could be difficult to identify an alternate who could provide consistent representation.
- Whether it might be possible to separate voting and expressing opinions, with alternates allowed to participate in the discussion but not in the consensus process.
- The need for some type of proxy voting for task force members who must miss a meeting, so that their constituency will still be represented in the decision.
- The importance for each task force member of hearing first-hand the points of view of the other members, learning from them, and possibly drawing new conclusions based on the discussion.
- The challenge inherent in the task force's charge since they were appointed to bring different perspectives to the table but are charged with thinking regionally about the whole system.
- Whether there might be a technological solution to allow members to participate in meetings by teleconference or videoconference even if they cannot attend in person.

There were questions as to how much “voting” the task force will be doing. Mr. Howell said that it is not clear yet how many decisions will need to be made or what the timeline will be. However, since the goal is to get the task force’s unanimous consensus on recommendations, he does not anticipate a series of formal votes. He also said that if the task force is deeply divided, its recommendations will not have the influence with policy makers that we would hope. He felt the process will work best if the task force members themselves are involved in both the discussions and in deciding on recommendations.

A number of task force members expressed support for allowing alternates to participate in discussions with the group on those occasions when a member could attend in person or participate via phone or another technology. There was not consensus about the ability to use a proxy for those circumstances when the task force was discussing its recommendations.

- **Decision.** This issue needs more exploration before the task force can finalize the ground rule.
- **Actions.** Mr. Howell will:
 - Talk with staff and others about possible technological options to allow task force members to participate in meetings from remote sites.
 - Have further conversations with staff and task force members to explore options for using alternates.
 - On an ongoing basis, provide advance notice to the task force of when it is likely that the task force will be discussing recommendations.

Other questions. Mr. Howell encouraged task force members with other questions or comments about the draft ground rules to get in touch with him.

Regarding information requests from the task force (Ground Rule #15), there was a question as to whether the responses to these requests will go only to the task force member who asked for information or to all the members. Mr. Howell said that the intent is that all task force members have the same information, so the response would go to all.

Regarding what information about the task force will be available to the public, Mr. Howell directed attention to the Metro Regional Transit Task Force Web page (<http://www.kingcounty.gov/transportation/TransitTaskForce.aspx>). Meeting notices and agendas will be posted on the site in advance of each meeting. The documents provided at each meeting also will be posted.

Some updates were mentioned that need to be made to the rosters in the background notebook. Metro staff will take care of this and will distribute updated rosters to the task force.

Overview of Briefing Notebooks

David Hull, Service Planning Supervisor for Metro, provided an overview of the background notebook. It includes selected background and resource materials to give task force members a base of relevant information. The notebook also includes links to full reports and documents for any task force member that would like further information. There are nine sections:

1. Task Force Information (roster, Council resolution, etc.)
2. Overview of King County Metro
3. Agencies in the Region (related to transit and transportation)
4. Metro Policy and Budget Framework
5. Metro Service Planning and System Development
6. King County Demographics
7. External Factors that Influence Metro's Planning
8. Transportation Funding
9. Acronyms and Glossary

There is space in the notebook so that members may add more materials during the course of the task force. The contents are also posted on the task force Web site.

Additional Information Needs – Initial Reactions

Mr. Howell noted that the next meeting will feature a significant time for background briefings, including Metro Transit 101. Based on the quick overview of the background notebook, he asked the task force members if there were other types of information they would like to see. Their responses were as follows:

- A crosswalk of the route numbers and regions served
- Information on the service changes made recently (for integration with Link Light Rail), especially which routes were reduced and the areas they served
- Information on the peak ridership numbers by route (route performance report)
- Copy of the regional transit map or other visuals that show Metro's services
- A visual to show the relationship of regional population density and Metro's routes
- Information on the performance audit
- Budget information
- Performance measure comparisons to other transit systems in the United States
- Trend lines for Metro routes and services over time
- Profile of Metro in comparison to Sound Transit and several comparable transit agencies in the country
- How Metro integrates with the regional multimodal transportation system

Since there were a number of questions about routes and usage, Mr. Desmond proposed that part of the briefing at the next meeting focus on route planning and performance.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will need to be a longer session. Mr. Howell polled the task force members to set the next meeting date and said that Metro staff will send out a scheduling e-mail survey for the subsequent dates.

The date selected for the next meeting was: **Tuesday, April 20, from 5:00 to 8:30 PM.** The location will be firmed up once staff has checked on the possibilities for teleconferencing or videoconferencing. Betty Gullledge-Bennett will send out an e-mail to the task force confirming the location and date.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 PM.