

Proposed Alternative Service and Allocation Framework

On July 14, 2010 I provided members of the Regional Transit Task Force a copy of a memo I sent to Metro via Task Force facilitator John Howell. In that memo I wrote that Metro's R-1 reduction scenario had taken the Task Force off course. Rather than using the values (e.g., land use, economic development, and productivity factors) rated highly by the Task Force in our discussions to restructure Metro services to be more financially sustainable; instead Metro used an approach that follows closely today's transit allocation policy and existing transit network.

Many Task Force members have stated a number of times that we believe that Metro must play a key role in helping the region realize the Puget Sound Regional Council's Vision 2040 for livable, sustainable, compact communities. The Metro transit allocation policies and strategy that the Task Force will recommend should support our regional growth policies.

At the August 5, 2010 Task Force meeting I was joined by Task Force members Grant Degginger (City of Bellevue) and Jim Stanton (Microsoft) in asking for an extended schedule for the Task Force to conduct its work. We believe that additional time is needed to consider several alternative service allocation concepts and scenarios for both service adds and cuts. We also believe that all the alternatives should be evaluated against a meaningful set of performance measures.

At the close of the meeting Councilmember Fred Butler (City of Issaquah) put forward an alternative geographic equity alternative for consideration. I welcome the inclusion of Councilmember Butler's proposal for review, but I have some major concerns about it. Equity should not be defined as continuing to allocate transit service on the basis of the amount of sales tax revenue that a community or area of the county generates. Doing so could result in running empty buses or near-empty buses which we have all said we do not want to do because that is totally inconsistent with our goals of productivity and efficiency. Transit service should be allocated and provided in a manner which meets a community's demand and need for transit service.

I would like to suggest the following alternative for review and discussion as well. This proposal introduces a service allocation concept that could be used in either a reduction or enhancement scenario. It prioritizes establishing services based on desired outcomes rather than being derived from the unsustainable existing transit network of routes by sub-area that is used today. It would help the region use Metro resources in a manner to help realize Vision 2040 in a more productive and cost effective manner.

Geographic equity is important and my proposal supports geographic equity as a consideration in fairness to the region. It defines equity as meaning providing transit service appropriate to the transit market in each area. Where transit markets are weakest the local community would have the opportunity to gain service when concrete steps are taken to make transit operations more cost-effective through land use and other local contributions (e.g., approving transit oriented development, improving rights-of-way for transit movements, and providing matching funds, etc.).

Proposed Alternative Service and Allocation Framework

Transit works best when it provides the most benefit to everyone in the region. For those who live in high density areas it allows mobility without a car and a more efficient use of our roads. At the same time those who live in more auto dependent areas will have the ability to drive to urban centers by car because the transit riders are using less road space to reach the centers.

It is natural for each jurisdiction or subarea to want to keep tax resources generated locally for local benefit. However, that subarea policy does not serve the region well particularly with regard to supporting the good land use policies that we have adopted. The benefit of transit is not directly related to the area where tax resources are generated, but in providing a balanced transportation system that makes mobility better throughout the region. This is a fair approach to allocating limited transit dollars.

Focusing most of our regional transit service to serve major employment, economic and higher density residential centers like Bellevue, Seattle, Renton, Redmond, Kent, Burien, Shoreline and others provides the greatest benefit to all regionally. Other areas far less populated should, of course receive transit service, but the frequency of service and type of service should be efficient and appropriate to the physical character and travel demand in an area.

Sales tax generation in the suburban areas may be greater than in Seattle, but that is simply a measure of where personal wealth is expended. Why should sales tax expenditures dictate how transit service is provided? Other county or local taxes for services or transportation infrastructure are not allocated on the basis of where the most revenue or sales tax comes from but rather where the need is the greatest.

We should be asking how we can best serve those areas where regional wealth is created. Regional wealth is created in the urban and manufacturing centers recognized in Vision 2040, currently more in some centers than others. Economic growth in areas with greater concentrations of jobs and housing (e.g. density) is highly dependent on frequent transit service – it is the congestion in these dense areas that makes transit a competitively attractive travel mode. These are the areas where we need to make transit work the most, to keep the economy rolling such that we can have a financially sustainable transit system.

Proposed Alternative Service and Allocation Framework

FRAMEWORK FOR PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO

Transit Service Allocation in Priority Order	Key Factors Addressed	Type of Service	Criteria To Use
High Density Residential and Employment areas and high travel corridors consistent with Vision 2040	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Productivity/efficiency • Financial Sustainability • Economic Development support • Land Use development support • Environmental sustainability 	High Intensity; frequent local, RapidRide, commuter express	High density areas of minimum density and size, travel corridors with minimum number of daily person trips
Support for Transit Dependent Populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land Use development support • Social Equity • Geographic Balance 	All day local 30 minute or 60 minutes service, depending on density	Moderate density areas of minimum size, 30 minute service Lower density areas of minimum size – 60 minute service
Geographic Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographic Balance • Social Equity • Financial sustainability 	Minimum lifeline service (not necessarily fixed route.) Partnership/matching fund for areas wishing to sponsor higher level of service.	Areas below minimum threshold of density or size for lowest tier of fixed route service.