



# KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

APRIL 1, 2020





## Follow-up on Paratransit Audit

**The Department of Metro Transit has made significant progress on recommendations to improve the cost, quality, and equity of paratransit service.** Transit executed a new paratransit contract in the fall of 2019 and is gearing up to put its contract management plan into effect. This plan includes standards, incentives, and disincentives for quality measures such as on-time performance and excessively long trips. Working with its new paratransit operator, Transit is also developing an online payment tool for Access riders, slated for release in July 2020. Meanwhile, Transit folded Access customer service into the Metro Customer Service center that manages calls from all Transit customers, increasing how quickly and comprehensively Access hears rider concerns.

Transit also hired a survey vendor to increase the use of customer satisfaction surveys and make it easier for riders with limited English proficiency to provide feedback. Data presented in 2019 shows that 40 percent of calls to the paratransit call center relied on interpreters, with Access riders speaking more than 30 different languages. To better serve riders, Transit added a Spanish-language queue at the call center, which accounted for eight percent of interpretation-assisted calls. Transit plans to implement more service improvements after it completes its Equity Impact Review in March 2020.

Many recommendations are in progress until Transit fully implements its plans. We will continue to monitor these recommendations until they are complete.

Of the 17 audit recommendations:

	4 DONE		10 PROGRESS		2 OPEN		1 CLOSED
<b>Fully implemented</b> Auditor will no longer monitor.		<b>Partially implemented</b> Auditor will continue to monitor.		<b>Remain unresolved</b> Auditor will continue to monitor.		<b>No longer applicable</b> Auditor will no longer monitor.	

Please see below for details on the implementation status of these recommendations.

## Recommendation 1

PROGRESS



**Transit should, on an ongoing basis, conduct an analysis aimed at optimizing the mix of service between the paratransit van service and alternatives, such as taxis.**

STATUS UPDATE: Transit updated its contract to require quarterly meetings with paratransit operators to review the mix of vehicles in service. Transit expects to hold the first of these meetings in April 2020.

WHAT REMAINS: Transit needs to hold quarterly meetings on service mix with the aim of optimizing service quality and cost.

## Recommendation 2

CLOSED



**Transit should thoroughly review compatibility and utility before purchasing information technology products and, after purchasing, work to use them.**

STATUS UPDATE: Under its new contract, Transit shifted responsibility for buying information technology assets to paratransit operators.

## Recommendation 3

PROGRESS



**Transit should complete and execute a contract management plan for monitoring the new contracts. For each contract requirement, the plan should specify: a) the method for verifying compliance; b) frequency of review; and c) staff member responsible.**

STATUS UPDATE: Transit drafted a contract management plan that clarifies when and how specific Transit staff will review paratransit performance. Transit's new contract went into effect in the fall of 2019, and Transit aims to execute its contract management plan in April 2020.

WHAT REMAINS: Transit needs to complete and execute its contract management plan.

## Recommendation 4

PROGRESS



**Transit should monitor and enforce contract incentives and disincentives for a period of one year, and based on this work: a) assess how they can more effectively improve productivity and performance; b) establish future dates to review them later in the five-year contract; and c) update the contract management plan to reflect these changes.**

STATUS UPDATE: Transit updated incentives and disincentives in its 2019 contract with an aim to improve productivity and performance. Transit will review the effectiveness of these measures annually as part of its draft contract management plan.

WHAT REMAINS: Transit needs to execute its contract management plan and begin carrying out annual reviews of incentives and disincentives to gauge their effectiveness.

## Recommendation 5

PROGRESS



**Transit should define excessively long trips in reference to fixed-route standards, regularly sample longer trips to count how many are excessively long, and take steps to make sure there is not a pattern of significant numbers of excessively long trips.**

STATUS UPDATE: Transit defined “excessively long trips” as on-board time plus 15 minutes and created a process to monitor monthly performance. It aims to deter contractors from booking too many excessively long trips with performance incentives and disincentives effective February 2020.

WHAT REMAINS: Transit needs to begin monthly performance monitoring and apply incentives and disincentives.

## Recommendation 6

DONE



**Transit should put in place monitoring and enforcement procedures to make sure paratransit riders are not dropped off more than 30 minutes before their appointments.**

STATUS UPDATE: Transit included incentives and disincentives for ensuring that riders get to their appointments no more than 30 minutes early in its new contract. The standard is for paratransit operators to drop off 92 percent of riders within this window. Transit is reviewing this metric monthly.

IMPACT: Paratransit riders should experience better service with more appropriate pick-up times and less waiting at their destination.

## Recommendation 7

PROGRESS



**Transit should provide additional fare payment methods that take into account riders’ needs and trip frequency.**

STATUS UPDATE: Transit is working with its contractor to release an online payment method in July 2020.

WHAT REMAINS: Transit needs to roll out its new fare payment method to paratransit riders.

## Recommendation 8

PROGRESS



**Transit should work directly with King County communities to develop activities that will address barriers to the Access paratransit program for people with limited English proficiency.**

STATUS UPDATE: As part of its Equity Impact Review, Transit met with stakeholders to find opportunities to address these barriers. In an update to Access Task Force members, Transit showed that 40 percent of calls to the paratransit call center relied on interpreters, with Access riders speaking more than 30 different languages. To better serve riders, Transit added a Spanish-

language queue at the call center, which accounted for eight percent of interpretation-assisted calls.

WHAT REMAINS: Transit will implement more relevant changes after the completion of its Equity Impact Review, which Transit indicates will be complete in March 2020.

#### Recommendation 9

On May 25, 2018

DONE



#### Recommendation 10

PROGRESS



**Transit should immediately take steps to implement an Equity Impact Review of the Access paratransit program.**

STATUS UPDATE: Transit is in the final stages of the Equity Impact Review process.

WHAT REMAINS: Transit needs to complete documentation of its review, which it aims to do in March 2020.

#### Recommendation 11

OPEN



**Transit should use the results of the Equity Impact Review to find and engage with historically underserved populations.**

STATUS UPDATE: Transit is in the final stage of the Equity Impact Review process.

WHAT REMAINS: Once the Equity Impact Review process is complete, Transit states that it will use findings and recommendations in the review to increase customer outreach and engagement among historically underserved populations.

#### Recommendation 12

OPEN



**Based on the Equity Impact Review and best practices, Transit should: a) develop community impact measures for the Access paratransit program; b) include the metrics in its Access paratransit performance monitoring plan; and c) annually report on equitable access to the program.**

STATUS UPDATE: Transit is in the final stage of the Equity Impact Review process.

WHAT REMAINS: Once the Equity Impact Review process is complete, Transit states that it will use findings and recommendations in the review to develop community impact measures and ways to monitor and report on them.

### Recommendation 13

DONE



**Transit should follow through with its commitment to establish a customer service function that is independent of control center, service provider, or turnkey contractors.**

STATUS UPDATE: Transit announced in September 2019 that under its new contract riders interested in providing non-urgent feedback should contact Metro Customer Service. Transit's main website includes a comment form for Access riders and directs these riders to the same customer service number as all other Transit customers. Transit sent out the announcement in Arabic, Chinese, English, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

IMPACT: Transit will have better access to customer input.

### Recommendation 14

PROGRESS



**Transit should gather feedback from active Access riders and prospective users on an annual basis and use this information to improve service quality.**

STATUS UPDATE: Transit contracted a survey vendor to conduct 800 customer satisfaction surveys per year among current Access riders and non-riders. The vendor began its customer research in the third quarter of 2019. In April 2020, Transit staff plan to review survey results and customer service complaint data for ways to improve service quality.

WHAT REMAINS: Transit needs to continue to gather regular feedback and use it to improve service quality.

### Recommendation 15

DONE



**Transit should use information from its 2016 Access paratransit survey to identify methods to increase the participation of historically underserved populations in future surveys, and implement them.**

STATUS UPDATE: Transit required its survey vendor to conduct telephone surveys of Access riders with limited English proficiency in their primary language. Transit collected riders' primary language as part of its 2016 survey. (For more ways Transit is increasing survey participation, see Recommendation 16.)

IMPACT: Transit reduced barriers to survey participation among riders with limited English proficiency.

### Recommendation 16

PROGRESS



**Transit should conduct nonresponse analysis following its 2017 and future surveys, and use this information to improve response rates and participation of historically underserved populations.**

STATUS UPDATE: Transit conducted its 2017 survey in Cantonese, English, Mandarin, and Spanish. It has since expanded translations to 15 top-tier languages based on the findings of its Equity Impact Review. These languages include Amharic, Arabic, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Punjabi, Romanian, Russian, Somali, Tagalog, Tigrinya, and Vietnamese. When designing its survey in 2019, Transit estimated that people with limited English proficiency made up six to eight percent of Access riders. In surveys completed in the first quarter of 2020, Transit had 15 surveys completed in languages other than English, accounting for seven and one-half percent of total respondents.

To increase response rates, Transit also mailed out targeted bilingual invitations for riders with limited English proficiency and began offering survey participants the chance to win a gift card.

WHAT REMAINS: Transit should continue to conduct nonresponse analysis, following its annual surveys, and show how it uses its findings to improve response rates and participation of historically underserved populations.

## Recommendation 17

PROGRESS



**Transit should supplement customer feedback and data reporting with direct observation such as a “mystery rider program” to ensure service quality.**

STATUS UPDATE: Transit is working with its operators to launch a “mystery rider program” pilot in the third quarter of 2020. The program aims to assess at least 20 routes per month. Transit states that mystery riders will be trained to record real-time observations of service quality and safety. Employees will get both positive and negative feedback from the program that may lead to commendations or more training or observation.

WHAT REMAINS: Transit needs to launch the program and begin using findings in its quality assurance processes.

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Megan Ko, senior management auditor, conducted this review. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the King County Auditor’s Office at [KCAO@KingCounty.gov](mailto:KCAO@KingCounty.gov) or 206-477-1033.