

R Line Community Engagement Summary

Phase 1 (June-October 2019) Summary

Last Updated: November 5, 2019

Background

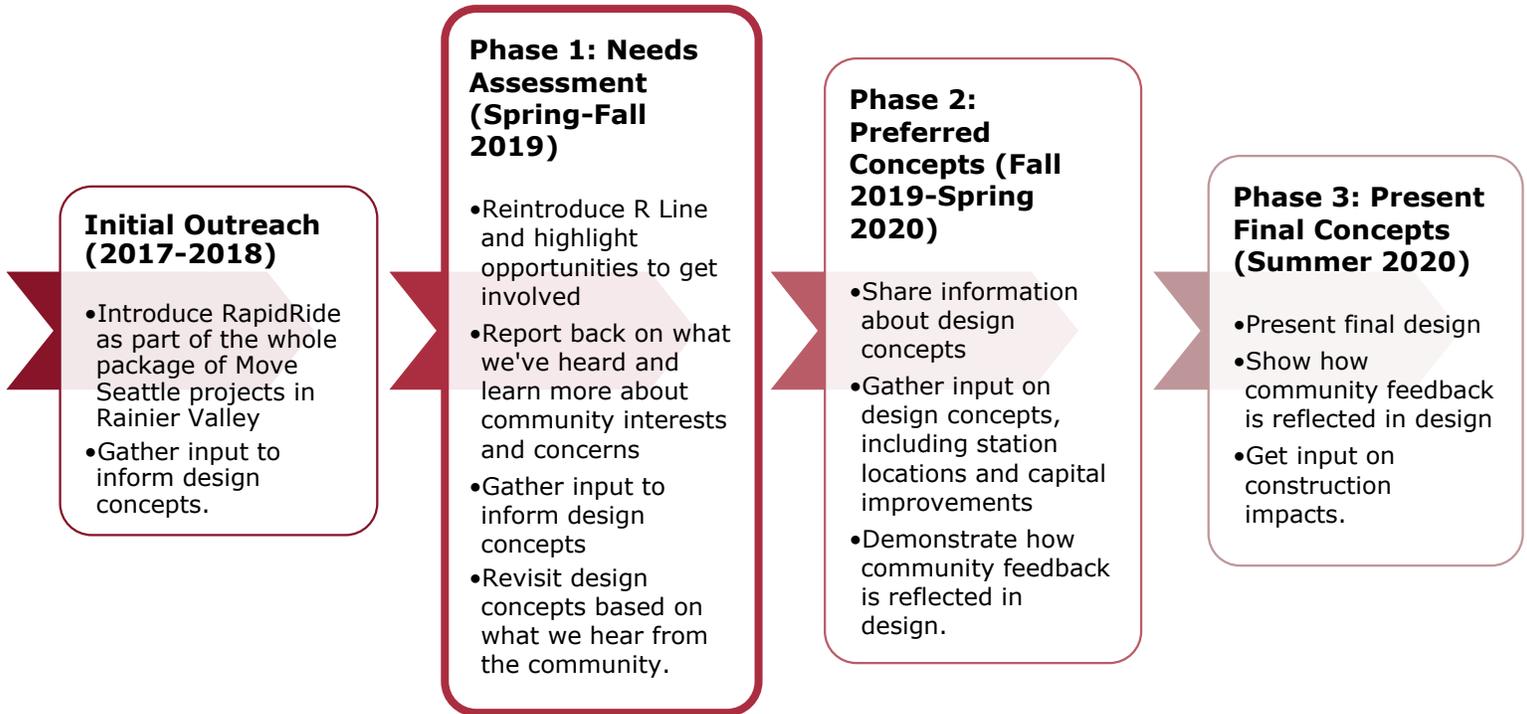
King County Metro (Metro) is upgrading bus service in Seattle’s Rainier Valley with a new RapidRide Line. By late 2024, RapidRide R Line will serve people who are currently using Route 7 with better, more reliable bus service. Route 7 is currently one of Seattle’s highest-ridership routes, serving 11,200 riders per day. Route 7 has been the Rainier Valley communities’ stable form of transportation—a lifeline through South Seattle—that has helped to create a sense of place for many in marginalized, historically underserved communities including people facing mobility and other accessibility issues, people with limited English proficiency (LEP), and people with lower incomes or who are experiencing homelessness.

The community around Route 7 and Rainier Avenue S is growing, and many of the people who live in the Rainier Valley depend on Route 7 to get to where they are going. People use this bus route most often as a local service—for traveling to the grocery store, school, medical appointments, and more—not just as a commuter shuttle to get to and from downtown. While Route 7 buses are scheduled to come every 10 minutes or sooner throughout most of the day, buses are often delayed. Metro’s key goal for RapidRide is to provide more reliable service—meaning buses will be more frequent and stay on-time more often. Additional benefits include:

- New and more reliable connections to Link light rail, with a focus on better access for people walking, rolling, and biking.
- Upgraded bus stations with improved lighting and visibility, shelter, and real-time arrival information.
- Enhanced customer experience with faster loading and unloading for all passengers, including those with mobility challenges.

Engagement Timeline

This graphic includes an overview of previous and planned engagement phases:



Building on Prior Engagement

The Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) previously led design, construction and outreach for this RapidRide expansion project until Metro took over as lead agency in early 2019. Metro is building on SDOT's previous work, and we are continuing to work together to engage people living in the Rainier Valley around improving bus reliability on Rainier Avenue S. In addition to Metro's work to upgrade bus service to RapidRide, SDOT is planning to improve the street infrastructure by 2022, which could include: bus-only lanes and signals, smart signals to reduce wait times for buses at traffic lights, and safety improvements at crossings and near bus stations.

Through 2017 and early 2018, SDOT led broad community engagement efforts to gather community input on transportation needs and priorities along Rainier Avenue S. Through a variety of face-to-face and online engagement tactics, including an online open house and survey, in-person surveys, and participation in community-led events, they introduced RapidRide and gathered input about how people in the community get around, the types of locations they are trying to access using Route 7, and their transit use and access priorities. To better reach historically underrepresented communities, SDOT worked with Department of Neighborhoods liaisons to present at low-income and senior housing developments and included interpretation and translation of materials into nine languages (Amharic, Chinese, Khmer, Omoro, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Tigrinya, and Vietnamese).

Overall, most people who engaged support faster, more reliable buses. People also strongly supported transit access, especially walking connections to and among transit stops. Many also expressed concern about consolidating bus stops, fare enforcement, affordability, safety, and potential displacement. Survey results varied between online and in-person survey participants. In-person respondents were less accepting of walking further to reach their nearest bus stop and indicated a greater preference for adding bus-only lanes along the corridor, as opposed to other potential multi-modal connectivity options. These differences are important to note given non-English speaking communities comprised the majority of in-person survey respondents.

Metro began community engagement for the planning and design phases of RapidRide R Line in Spring 2019. This represents the first re-engagement around RapidRide since SDOT’s last round of work in early 2018. Metro has reset the vision for RapidRide and re-evaluated proposed plans to upgrade bus service, improve traffic safety, and make better walking, biking, and bus connections to light rail stations along Rainier Avenue S. Given the extensive community input on this line, we first needed to report back on what we have heard, explain how these issues and concerns will be reflected in design, and highlight the upcoming opportunities to influence decision-making.

Overview

Community Engagement Goals

Specific goals and indicators of success for the current phase of engagement are below.

Goal: Re-engage around RapidRide in the Rainier Valley and introduce the R Line.

Indicators of Success:

- Metro identifies key priority stakeholders to engage/re-engage who can promote broader engagement and inform effective, appropriate engagement strategies and tactics.
- Metro introduces community members to the differences between RapidRide and traditional Metro bus service.

Goal: Gather community input to inform design concepts.

Indicators of Success:

- Metro hears from a range of community members about their transportation needs and priorities, especially around station locations and access to transit investments.
- Community members know how their input will be used and how to contact Metro with further feedback.

Community Engagement Approach

Given the time passed since the last round of outreach in Rainier Valley, we began by reintroducing the R Line and validating what we have heard to date. Examples of areas for conversation include:

- The elements of the existing Route 7 that people appreciate most as well as areas for improvement.
- Priority origins and destinations when using Route 7.
- Barriers to accessing transit as well as improvements to encourage greater transit use.
- Ways to effectively share information with and gather input from the historically underrepresented or underserved communities.

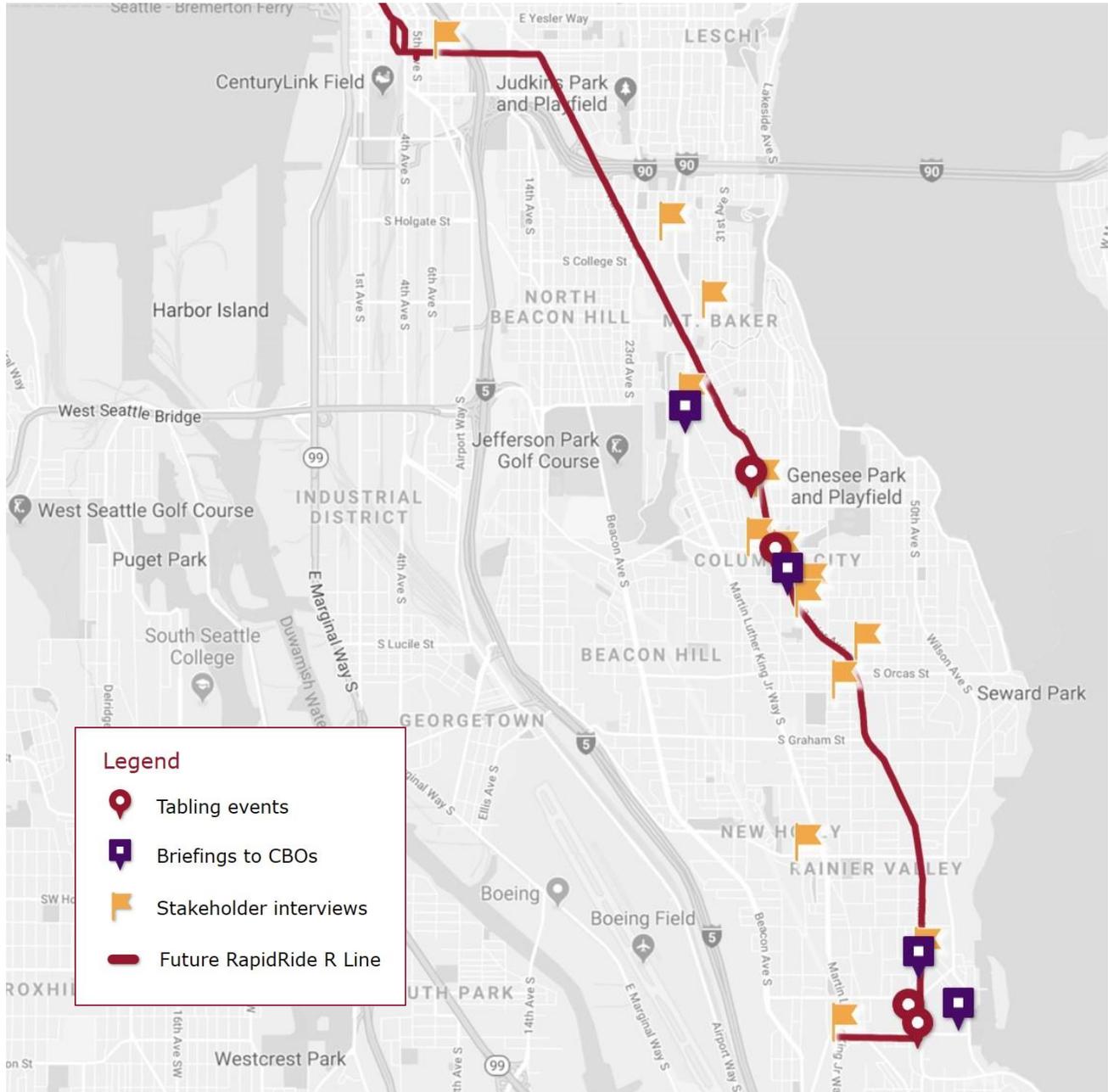
Throughout this phase, we continued to work closely with SDOT to coordinate engagement efforts and develop consistent messaging about work happening in the area.

Community engagement during this phase consisted of:

- **Stakeholder interviews:** The project team interviewed community-based organizations (CBOs) and community groups along the corridor to build relationships, understand the needs of communities they serve or represent, and gather input on outreach and engagement strategies for Phase 2. We focused our interviews based on stakeholder’s geographic spread along the future R Line route, diversity of communities served, and ability to share information to other organizations in the community. We are not limiting community engagement to the people served by these stakeholders; rather, this group serves as a starting point to build out our stakeholder network throughout the project.
- **In-person outreach:** Metro tabled and conducted outreach at community events to get the word out about RapidRide R Line and ask about where people want to go (to inform station locations) and access to transit needs/improvements (to inform capital investments). We also hosted community briefings in partnership with several of our priority stakeholders to talk with their members about the project and gather feedback.
- **Online survey:** The project team surveyed community members to help inform service design and station locations. We programmed the online survey in English, Simplified Chinese, Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese. The survey included questions on:
 - Current Route 7 use, including routes, payment methods, and how community members currently travel to bus stops
 - Current barriers to using transit and specific issues or concerns around using or accessing transit
 - Where people go, or would like to go, using Route 7
 - Desired improvements to using and accessing transit
 - Demographic information
 - Preferred communication and outreach methods.

Map of community engagement

The map below shows the locations throughout the Rainier Valley where the project team conducted stakeholder interviews, participated in community events, and held briefings with community groups.



Practicing inclusive engagement

The communities around Route 7 and Rainier Avenue S are among the most diverse in Seattle, with higher rates of racial, cultural, and language diversity than the city-wide averages. Throughout this project, we intentionally seek to hear from people from groups who have been historically underrepresented or overlooked when it comes to transportation planning. The following icons represent the tactics used to facilitate more inclusive engagement.



Drop-in visits



Translation and interpretation



Focused survey distribution



Focused community briefings



Focused tabling

During Phase 1, we sought to re-engage or newly engage with CBOs who represent and serve populations that have historically been underserved. We made a point to be present in the Rainier Valley community and conducted drop in visits to certain CBO offices in cases where traditional outreach means, such as sending introductory emails and making phone calls, did not elicit responses. We understand that many of these CBOs are busy implementing programs and cannot prioritize addressing additional asks. These in-person conversations provided a chance to explain our work and identify the most convenient and appropriate ways to engage.

To facilitate broader awareness of the project, we translated our fact sheet and survey into the top languages identified through the 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) including Simplified Chinese, Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese. In addition to providing materials in these languages, we asked CBO staff about languages spoken in the communities they serve. Since census data was collected in 2016 and understanding the demographics of South Seattle are constantly changing, the best way to identify non-English language needs is by asking these partners for languages spoken in the communities they serve and represent. Throughout our Phase 1 engagement, we confirmed that Chinese, Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese are indeed common languages spoken at home throughout the Rainier Valley. Additionally, Amharic, Arabic, Oromo and Tigrinya emerged as other common languages. We will continue prioritizing in-language materials and engagement opportunities throughout subsequent engagement phases.

While a broadly distributed online survey is a common way to quickly get feedback from many people, survey respondents are typically English-speaking and wealthier. To widen our survey's reach beyond typical respondents, we launched the survey through emailing the links to community partners we have engaged with to date and asked them to help us distribute the survey through their community. We also focused our in-person outreach efforts on opportunities to engage with communities we did not hear from during previous engagement and who would be unlikely to participate in an online survey. For example, we presented at Ethiopian Community in Seattle (ECS) and Asian Counseling and Referral Services (ACRS) weekly senior programs and engaged in discussions using interpreters.

Throughout our stakeholder interviews and conversations with partners, we often heard about the importance of compensating CBOs and community members for their time to coordinate events and provide feedback. As a result, we formalized our partnership to compensate one CBO and will look to expand this practice to additional partners as we continue our engagement. We will continue deferring to and learning from our community partners about the most appropriate and effective ways to share information and gather input.

Getting the word out

The icons below represent the different channels we used to spread the word about the project and opportunities to provide feedback.



Tabling at community events



Emails to community partners



Rider alerts via email and text message



Information posted on the Metro R Line website

What we heard

Community members and stakeholders offered valuable feedback about their communities' needs and priorities for future transit service in the Rainier Valley. The following graphic summarizes our engagement reach.

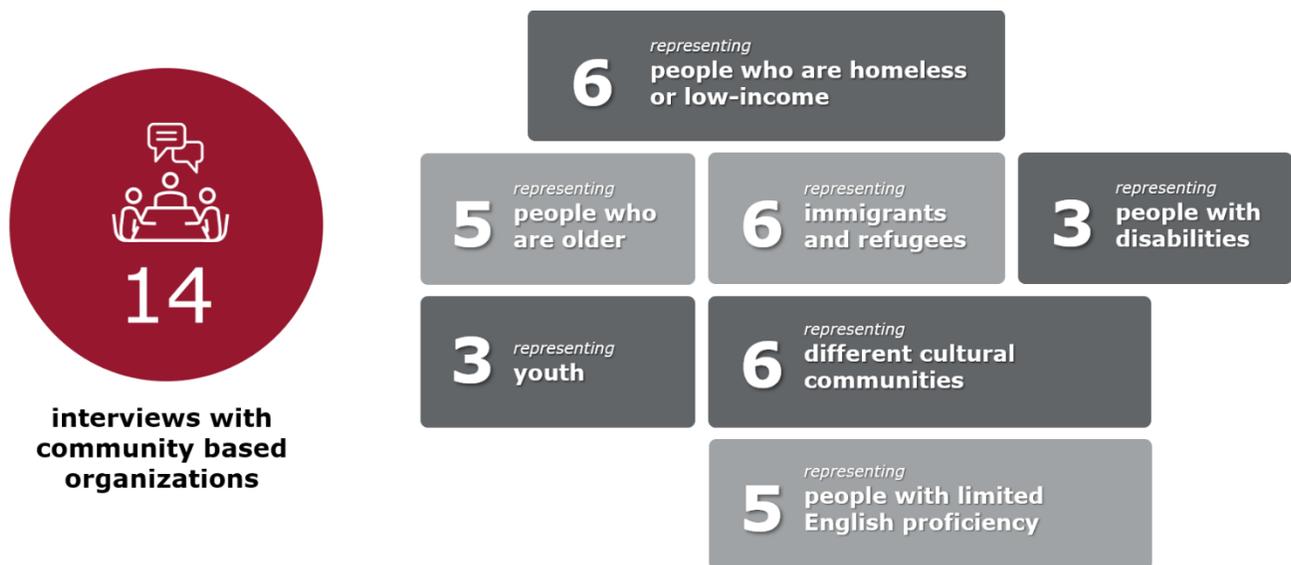


A few key themes emerged:

- Community members rely on Route 7 to access essential services including food, work, school, medical appointments, and more. They highly value this local service.
- Many people are unfamiliar with RapidRide and fear changes to Route 7 service.
- Community members want more reliable service to travel to places within the Rainier Valley, South King County, downtown Seattle, and to other transit.
- Participants are concerned about bus stop consolidation.
- Many community members support RapidRide upgrades, especially increased lighting, station upgrades, safety improvements, and roadway and intersection improvements to help prevent bus delays.
- Some people are concerned about personal safety while waiting for and riding buses within the Rainier Valley.
- Fare enforcement and affordability remain significant concerns.
- Participants support better and safer access to bus stations especially for people with mobility challenges.
- Metro should clearly communicate how and when community members can influence decision making. Many Rainier Valley residents are willing to engage but fatigued from ongoing transportation and other work happening in their community.

Stakeholder interviews

The project team interviewed 14 CBOs and community groups representing various historically underrepresented communities.



Interviewees provided additional context about the communities they serve and shared feedback about how people in their communities use transit, barriers and facilitators to using transit, opportunities to improve access to transit, and strategies to better engage people in transit planning. Key themes emerged in the following areas:

Route 7 and general transit service

- The most common concern around this project is bus stop consolidation. Interviewees encouraged Metro to provide clear explanation and justification around why station locations might shift or change.
- Fare enforcement remains a significant concern. Interviewees encourage Metro to provide greater public education around how the fare enforcement system works and why it exists.
- Some people expressed concern about real and perceived threat of personal safety on Route 7.
- While many community members rely on Route 7 for local service, some also use it for commuting.
- People want more frequent and reliable connections between the Rainier Valley and South King County.
- Many interviewees asked about adding local bus service to complement RapidRide R Line.
- Interviewees support more connections to light rail stations and other transit hubs.
- Many groups highlighted specific destinations along Rainier Avenue S that are important to the communities they serve. See map in [Appendix A](#).

Access to transit

- The Department of Services for the Blind said a longer walk to a station is acceptable if people have safe infrastructure.
- Many groups highlighted specific locations along the corridor to prioritize improvements. See map in [Appendix B](#).

Engagement

- Interviewees asked Metro to clearly share how we will use community feedback and explain when people can expect to hear from us next.
- Many people in the Rainier Valley are not familiar with the RapidRide brand.
- The Rainier Valley community has experienced frequent engagement on transportation-related projects. Many folks acknowledged that the feelings of feedback fatigue are real, but they are still willing to engage.
- Several groups, including ACRS and Seattle Chinatown International District Development and Preservation Authority (SCIDpda) emphasized that 2020 will be a

heavily packed year for community engagement due to the 2020 Census and elections. We should look to organize and coordinate as early as possible.

We reached out to 27 priority stakeholders and held in-depth stakeholder interviews with the following 14 groups. While some groups did not respond to our multiple outreach attempts, others preferred to engage later in the process once we had draft plans for them to respond to in Phase 2. The table below includes the groups interviewed as well as the communities they represent and serve organized by interview date.

Date	Organization/Group	Community represented
7/3/19	Columbia City Business Association	Local business owners
7/9/19	Rainier Valley Greenways	Cyclists, active transportation advocates
7/10/19	Rainier Beach Action Coalition (RBAC) / Rainier Beach Economic Development Roundtable (RBED)	RBED: Local business owners RBAC: Youth, African-American population
7/16/19	Rainier Valley Food Bank	People who are older, have low-income, have mobility challenges, and with LEP; immigrants, and refugees
7/23/19	Mount Baker Housing	Low-income populations, immigrants, and refugees
7/23/19	International Community Health Services	Low-income populations, people with LEP, immigrants and refugees, people who are older
7/24/19	HomeSight	Low-income populations
7/26/19	Ethiopian Community in Seattle (ECS)	People with LEP, low-income populations, immigrants and refugees, youth, people who are older, Ethiopian population
7/31/19	Asian Counseling and Referral Services (ACRS)	People with LEP, immigrants and refugees, youth, people who are older, Asian Pacific Islander population
8/5/19	Department of Services for the Blind	People with disabilities
8/7/19	Hillman City Business Association	Local business owners
8/14/19	Lighthouse for the Blind	People with disabilities

8/26/19	Seattle Chinatown International District Preservation and Development Authority (SCIDpda)	People with LEP, low-income populations, immigrants and refugees, people who are older, Asian Pacific Islander population
9/4/19	Hillman City Neighborhood Association	Hillman City residents

In-person engagement

Metro worked with key stakeholders to identify opportunities for in-person engagement. We engaged Rainier Valley residents and businesses in-person at the following types of events:

- **Tabling:** Metro hosted booths at community events. The booth featured interactive maps and handouts about RapidRide R Line. Project staff encouraged visitors to place stickers on laminated maps to provide feedback about station locations. We provided factsheets in English, Spanish, Somali, Chinese, and Vietnamese. Project staff encouraged people to sign up for email updates.
- **Briefings:** Community engagement staff prepared short presentations about R Line with interpreters when appropriate. Events included Q&A sessions and facilitated discussions to encourage community feedback.

The table below provides an overview of Phase 1 in-person engagement efforts.

Event	Format	Audience	Reach
Rainier Beach Back2School Bash	Tabling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rainier Beach community and youth • Diverse group of attendees including many people with LEP 	320 youth and families
SDOT Street Safety Pop- Up	Tabling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students and families of Rainier Beach High School and South Shore K-8 	27 youth and families
Columbia City Business Improvement Area Board Meeting	Briefing and discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Columbia City property owners 	6 board members
Columbia City Farmers Market	Tabling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Columbia City community members 	116 attendees
ECS Senior Program	Briefing and discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethiopian seniors served by ECS 	40 attendees

Rainier Valley Food Bank Distribution Day	Tabling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low income populations, including people who are older, immigrant and refugee populations, people experiencing homelessness, and people with LEP 	60 guests
ACRS Club Bamboo Meal Program	Briefing and discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asian and Pacific Islander elders served by ACRS 	75 attendees

Participants engaged in person provided a wide variety of comments on Route 7, future RapidRide R Line, and other transit needs and priorities. Key themes emerged in the following areas:

Existing Route 7 service

- Community members appreciate Route 7 service and have noticed increased ridership, especially among youth.
- Riders repeatedly noted concerns about Route 7 including reliability, traffic, speed, fare cost, and safety at bus stops and onboard.
- Some riders noted that buses need accessibility improvements such as handrails for safe on- and off-boarding.
- Many people highlighted specific destinations along Rainier Avenue S that are important to serve. See map in [Appendix A](#).

RapidRide R Line

- Many community members were unaware of RapidRide R plans and shared both excitement for RapidRide coming to their community as well as fear about changes to existing Route 7 service.
- Community members expressed support for increased reliability and safety improvements associated with the R Line upgrade, including faster boarding, connections to Link light rail, improved bus stop amenities, and dedicated bus lanes.
- Some community members shared concerns about increased fare enforcement. They expressed that they would pay the fare, and do, when they can afford it.
- Some riders expressed concerns around stop consolidation and noted that the distance between stations on other RapidRide routes is too far.

R Line station locations, features, and access to stations

- Community members were relieved to hear Metro understands riders need local service along Rainier Avenue S and plans to provide more stations along R Line than other RapidRide routes.

- Many visitors expressed support for station upgrades, including lighting, shelter, seating, and other features to improve accessibility for people with disabilities.
- Most comments about the R Line reroute from Prentice Loop to Rainier Beach Station were positive, although many riders encouraged Metro to continue serving this area.
- Visitors generally appreciated plans for additional connections to Link light rail stations and want more connections to transit hubs.
- Participants support safer connections for people walking, rolling, and biking to stations.
- See map in [Appendix B](#) for specific locations of concern.

Other Metro services and community engagement

- Many participants shared feedback about other Metro bus routes. In general, community members want more connections as well as more frequent, reliable service.
- Participants requested information about accessing ORCA cards, especially for seniors. Community members perceive difficulty in getting an ORCA card.
- Participants requested more affordable fares for people who have little to no income. Some community members specifically mentioned fares under a dollar would be best.
- Several participants expressed interest in Via services.
- Several people appreciated in-language materials and interpretation services.

Online survey

The project team invited CBOs and community groups to participate in an online survey and received 227 responses. Most people (92 percent) ride Route 7 at least occasionally. Respondents who take Route 7 overwhelmingly (96 percent) pay using an OCRA card or Regional Reduced Fare Permit. Most riders arrive at Route 7 bus stops by walking (64 percent), or by combining walking with other modes (92 percent). Most respondents (83 percent) travel to their bus stop within ten minutes.

A summary of respondent demographics:

- Almost half of the survey respondents (44 percent) have an estimated household income within 80 percent of the Seattle Area Median Income (AMI). In dollars, this means their household income is at or under \$79,450 for a family of three.
- Forty percent of survey respondents are people of color.
- About one-fifth of the survey respondents use a language other than English at home, including (listed in order of frequency): Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Somali, French, Ilocano, American Sign Language (ASL), Danish, Filipino, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Japanese, Lithuanian, Malayalam, Portuguese, Tagalog, and Thai.
- About 1 in 10 respondents (13 percent) have some type of disability.

Respondents provided additional context about their experiences with transit, barriers, and engagement preferences. Some people described the importance of a timely bus with a safe and clean riding experience. A few people wrote about the importance of using Via, Sound Transit, and other services to connect to the Route 7. Key themes emerged in the following areas:

Route 7 and general transit service

- About half of the survey respondents who ride the Route 7 (53 percent) were satisfied with the overall service on Route 7.
- Many respondents expressed concern about personal and traffic safety when traveling in the Rainier Valley.
 - Some people suggested that Metro and SDOT could improve safety by prioritizing bus and/or pedestrian traffic flow over single-occupancy vehicles.
 - Many respondents shared they do not take the Route 7 at night because they feel unsafe. Some noted better lighting would help them feel safer at night.
 - Many survey respondents also expressed concerns about personal safety while walking to and waiting for the bus. Some of these people said they choose ridesharing services (e.g., Lyft, Uber) because they do not feel safe using the bus.
- Survey respondents shared the following important places travel by bus: work, home, grocery stores and food banks, shops, non-profit organizations, public schools, churches, transit centers, light rail stations (e.g., Pioneer Square, Mount Baker, Columbia City) and nearby areas (e.g., South Capitol Hill, Central District, Downtown Seattle, Rainier Beach, Renton). See map in [Appendix A](#) for specific locations submitted by respondents.

Access and barriers to transit

- Almost half of survey respondents (42 percent) experience a barrier to accessing transit or using the Route 7 bus.
- Respondents' most common barrier to taking the Route 7 (22 percent) was **how long it takes to get to their destination**. Many riders who said the time it takes to reach their destination was not a barrier were still dissatisfied with how long it takes to get to places on the Route 7 bus (40 percent).
- The second-most common barrier to taking the Route 7 was **how often the bus comes**. Some Route 7 riders (16 percent) identified this as a barrier. Many riders who did not experience timeliness as a barrier were still dissatisfied with bus frequency (42 percent).
- The third-most common barriers to taking the Route 7 were **safety while waiting for the bus** and **safety on the bus**. Some Route 7 riders (14 percent) identified these factors as barriers. About a quarter of riders who did not experience safety as a barrier were still dissatisfied with how safe they feel on the Route 7 bus.
- Some respondents shared that a longer, safer, well-lit walk to their bus stop is acceptable if pedestrian infrastructure (e.g., crosswalk signals, well-marked, non-slippery pathways) is adequate.

- When asked about issues that concerned them, many respondents wrote about the importance of safe and accessible crosswalks. Some intersections were particularly problematic—a few respondents said they purposely cross unsafely because of the poorly timed, inaccessible, or absent crosswalk signals at intersections. Many respondents highlighted specific locations along the corridor to prioritize improvements. See map in [Appendix B](#).

Communication and engagement

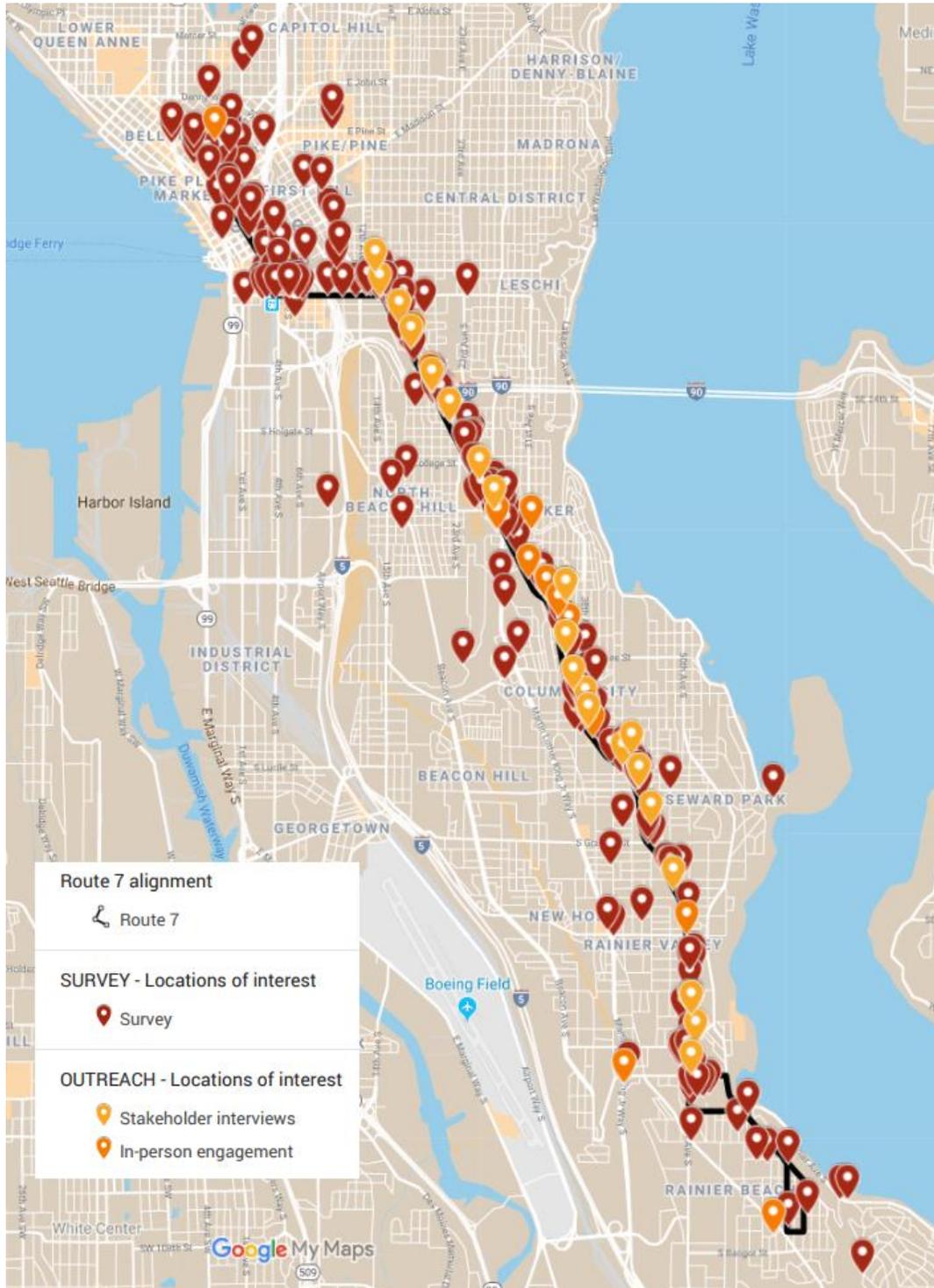
- When asked how survey respondents prefer to receive project updates, survey respondents said Metro should use email alerts (45 percent), Metro website updates (28 percent), or text alerts (15 percent).
- When respondents wrote how they found out about the survey, about half of respondents (51 percent) heard about the survey from Metro. People also heard from employers (20 percent) and community-based organizations (11 percent).

Next steps

The community input received during Phase 1 will help the project team develop design concepts and inform future communications and engagement activities. We will continue building our relationships with community partners through meetings and participating and presenting at community events. We will seek to engage the broader public by hosting in-person and online engagement activities. During the next phase, Metro will seek input on draft concepts, including bus station locations, and demonstrate how community feedback informed these design concepts.

Appendix A: Outreach Feedback – Locations of Interest

The map below includes specific points participants indicated as locations they would like to access using the RapidRide R Line. An interactive version of the map, including notes explaining why this point was added (when available), can be accessed via clicking the map or [this link](#).



Appendix B: Outreach Feedback – Access Issues and Improvements

The map below includes specific points participants indicated as locations with access to transit issues, general concerns, or desired improvements. An interactive version of the map, including notes explaining why this point was added (when available), can be accessed via clicking the map or [this link](#).

