



King County

Metro Fares Advisory Group Workshop #1

MEETING SUMMARY

March 2, 2017

Washington Hall, the Lodge Meeting Room

153 14th Ave, Seattle

1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Participants

- Aaron Morrow, King County Transit Advisory Commission
- Anne Eskridge, University of Washington, Transportation Services
- Arielle Washington, Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle
- August DeVries, Bellevue Downtown Association/TransManage
- Claire McDaniel, Sound Generations
- Daphne Pie, Public Health – Seattle King County
- Hester Serebrin, Transportation Choices Coalition
- Hope Drumond, Alliance of People with disAbilities
- Janelle Rothfolk, Catholic Community Services of King County
- Katie Wilson, Transit Riders Union
- Kimberly Heymann, Alliance of People with disAbilities

Absent

- Gail Gustavson, International Community Health Services
- Gregory Davis, Rainier Beach Action Coalition
- Jeff Aumell, Microsoft
- Jeff Kever, Seattle Central College
- Karen Westling, Swedish – First Hill
- Kendle Bjelland, Commute Seattle
- Rogelio Riojas, SeaMar

Welcome and opening remarks: Fares Work Program purpose and goals

Chris O’Claire, Manager of Strategic Planning and Analysis at King County Metro, welcomed participants and observers to the meeting. She provided an overview of Metro’s Fare Work Program being planned with input from the advisory group and the public, including the purpose and goals of Metro’s work related to fares. (See page 2 “Purpose” and page 3 “Goals” in meeting slides.)

Introductions

DeAnna Martin, Community Relations Planner at King County Department of Transportation and meeting facilitator, introduced staff and asked participants to introduce themselves sharing their name; any affiliations they’d like the group to be aware of; and if/when they ride transit how they pay their fare.

Meeting agenda and purpose, role of advisory group, timeline, and scope

DeAnna when on to review the meeting purposes, which were to:

- Introduce participants to each other and the process; the advisory group's charter, scope, and timeline.
- Build and deepen awareness about Metro's existing fares, fare payment system, and known and unknown issues that need to be addressed in the short or long term.
- Solicit input on criteria by which fare changes considered in the short-term should be analyzed and prioritized.

She reviewed the role of the advisory group and a work program outline for the meetings of the group. (See page 6 "Role of this Group" and page 7 "Timeline" in meeting slides.) She invited participants to practice King County's Guidelines for Multicultural Interactions during each meeting and asked participants to acknowledge their commitment to these guidelines. (See handout.)

Briana Lovell, Transportation Planner and program manager at King County Metro, provided an overview of the Fare Work Program's scope of work and how advisory group feedback would shape the scope. (See pages 8-9 "Scope of our Work" in meeting slides.)

One participant asked whether the pilot program ideas in the short-term would go to King County Council in June. Staff answered that, if they need council adoption, they would, but there are many things Metro can do without council approval.

Another participant asked when would zone and peak surcharge changes go into effect? Staff responded that the changes may go into effect in 2019 or later as they would be tied to the implementation of the next generation of ORCA.

Existing Conditions: background on Metro fares

Briana oriented the group to background on Metro's fares. (See pages 10-13 on "Existing Conditions" in the meeting slides for details.) She focused on some high level details from a larger and more in-depth handout distributed to the group. (See handout.)

As she presented, participants provided the following comments and questions:

- Q: What part of revenues for Metro do fares make up? If there are reductions in that, does service get sacrificed? A: Metro has a fare recovery policy target of 30% - meaning that 30% of the operating cost of the service should be recuperated by fares, and a floor of 25%. Vanpool has a 100% fare recovery. Access Transportation has no fare recovery mandate.
- Concern was expressed that the impact of a service "reduction" if revenue goes down would affect the programs that serve to make transit accessible.

Staff noted that there was more detail on policies that relate to fares in the background packet, and would be happy to provide answers to additional questions.

- An Access customer shared that Access Transportation program has potential to be impacted by service and fare changes.
- Concern was shared about the quality of the experience riding the bus and how that correlates to ridership and people's sense of the value they pay for riding.

Staff shared that aspects of the fare work program that focus on ease of payment and speeding up boarding are related to customer experience as well as cost-efficiencies that can allow Metro to put greater resources toward the service itself.

- Cost of housing is interrelated with transportation in terms of what is affordable for people. Analysis needs to include this. As cost of housing goes up, people move to where it is more affordable. This may mean traveling longer distances.
- There is an equity intersection between fare recovery and service allocation that varies from route to route and by time of day.
- Q: What is an ORCA Passport? A: A participating employer pays all or some percentage of the cost. Q: What's an ORCA Puget Pass? A: A monthly pass some employers reimburse fully or partially. Comment: the product names are confusing.
- Q: On the slide about how riders pay their fares, is this a percentage based on rides or riders? A: It's percentage of rides.
- Q: Is Sound Transit also doing work around this? A: Yes, we are partnering at the staff planning level and on outreach in April to consider changes to make fares simpler. Any changes we make to fares will be discussed with and in alignment with partner agencies. Other agencies considering changes include Community Transit and Pierce Transit.
- Comment on how to increase youth ridership, means we need to redefine the definition of youth to include all students, not just young people.

Staff responded that the current definition of youth is 6 to 18 years old, but that Metro has been in conversation with colleges about how to make it easier for students who qualify for ORCA LIFT to take advantage of the incentives colleges provide for riding transit. There are also differences between grade school and high school level ridership. The entire topic of student fares is worth exploring in pilot projects.

- At the UW, there are food banks on campus. One third of students struggle at some point making ends meet while enrolled at the university. UW is exploring what it means that there's a U-Pass and ORCA LIFT. Are there cost advantages for both the university and students in getting the right ORCA product in the hands of students who are struggling to make ends meet?
- Some youth remain in high school until they are 21 years old.
- On the "How the discounts we provide today affect fare revenue" slide, there were questions about what this data was showing. A: The numbers here reflect the difference between base adult fare and lower fares provided.
- Concern was expressed that this chart shows the "loss" of fare revenue because of discounts instead of showing the "value" of increased ridership because a discount is being offered.

- Q: What was the policy rationale for the Access fare being “closer” to the adult base fare? A: This policy was established long ago when Access was first created. The FTA rules that apply to paratransit fares indicate that the paratransit fare cannot be more than double the adult base fare, which would currently be \$5.00. At \$1.75 Access is still below the adult base fare.

Staff noted that this is intended to show the value of the discount provided through reduced fares, not the lost revenue. Metro could also look at the amount of revenue these discounted fares bring in rather than what they don't.

Staff said they would work to add more of that information to the existing conditions piece and share it with the group.

In response to the slide entitled, “What we've heard,” which was followed by an invitation to tell us if anything was missing from the list, participants added:

- There are some who can't afford the \$3 card to get the Regional Reduced Fare Permit (RRFP); can't afford the \$5 minimum load on an ORCA card; or can't afford the \$5 card charge for a LIFT replacement
- People with disabilities receiving the max supplemental security income get \$733 a month. A monthly transit pass is a big chunk out of this monthly budget which covers the cost of housing, food, and transportation.
- The large amount of documentation required for an RRFP or ORCA LIFT is a barrier for people to get it.
- We wonder about clients we give bus tickets to and how many have an ORCA card already, but can't afford to load it.

What guides our work? Discussion of policy and community goals

Briana provided a quick overview of the policy goals that guide Metro's work around fares. (See page 14 “What Guides our Work.”)

Participants asked what “easy for customers” means. They advocated that the policy definition should include language access and the ability to travel easily across the county border or multiple modes.

Another participant asked whether the policies were prioritized in any way or whether there is direction about which policy prevails when an obvious tradeoff between them is presented. Staff explained that there is no explicit guidance on fare-related policy tradeoffs, although ultimately King County Council sets and directs these policies.

DeAnna facilitated the group in an exercise to identify criteria or priorities by which any changes to fare payment should be weighed against. The group came up with the following categories: (Note: each bullet indicates a hand-written comment by participants on a post-it note.)

Increase the market share for all markets

- Does it increase the % of low-income rides?

- Cost recovery goes up through increased ridership via ease of use and good marketing materials
- Does it increase the share of rides taken w/an ORCA unlimited pass?
- Does it expand “market share” of employer passport clients - and landlord subsidized pass programs?
- Does it improve transit access for low-income and very low-income riders?

Equity

- Equity: in distribution, in impact, in services available

Safety

- Look at Muni in San Francisco that does not accept cash payment for a model

Assures or Improves Service Quality

- Speeds up boarding
- Timeliness of service
- Geography of transit service
- Expanded early & evening service even if price point is higher to encourage additional ridership
- Rate/speed of boarding the bus
- On-time service
- Rates provided around public services for low income/disabled
- Dependability and safety of buses and for riders and operators
- Frequency of peak transit service

Affordability

- Cost is not barrier
- Expanded definition of student youth rider fees
- Working families can afford Metro bus pass for children who don't qualify for ORCA LIFT
- Affordability for all income levels
- Greatest intersection opportunity for low-income without cuts to service – higher volume ridership of low income riders
- Reduce costs associated with a student fare
- Impact on people with disabilities, including income

Integration

- Integrated services with integrated rates
- Impact on regional partnership
- Intersects clearly with partner service and zones
- Metro bus tickets can be used for light rail

Extent to which change requires fare enforcement

Simple, Ease of Understanding

- Simplicity of employee pass program options
- Simplicity of fare structure
- Ease of understanding or don't have to think about it

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- Improve accessibility by using interactive tools like ONEBUSAWAY push this tool so people know about it.
- Put a QR code on cards so people can check balances on go w/smart phone
- Easier to replace lost cards
- Phone app – like Starbucks card
- Increase locations, access to kiosks
- Clear directions for how to access and descriptions of the product/service riders need

Public Responsiveness

- Positive response from the community – get their feedback

Next steps

DeAnna indicated that the goal input would be used to describe and assess fare options Metro will bring to the group at the next meeting and out to the public for broader feedback in April. She spoke briefly about the public engagement plan as a whole and invited participants to share names of organizations Metro should reach out to as stakeholders – for briefing or contracting with to conduct community-based outreach. She announced that the next meeting would be either April 4 or 5 from 3:30-5:30 and polled the group as to which date they preferred.

Adjourn