

Mid-Year Update to the Regional Transit Task Force from Metro General Manager Kevin Desmond

Since my December 2011 progress report, Metro has continued acting on the RTTF's recommendations for transforming our transit system. Here's an update on what we've accomplished and what's ahead.

Service changes

We are in various stages of making three service revisions this year. They are based on our new service guidelines and reflect the priorities you recommended: productivity, geographic value, and social equity.

In February, we converted three bus routes to dial-a-ride-transit service, a less-costly way to meet local transit needs in lightly populated areas.

On June 9, we will shift about 34,000 service hours from low-performing routes to higher-performing routes where additional service is needed to reduce overcrowding and improve on-time performance. We'll also add service to an underserved corridor in South King County. When the County Council approved these changes, they also asked us to address concerns about transit service in southeast Seattle, and we are actively engaged in conversations with members of that community. » [Find details about the June changes](#)

On May 7, the County Council unanimously approved our major proposal to restructure bus service this September in Seattle and some nearby communities. Along with starting RapidRide service to downtown Seattle from Ballard and West Seattle—two of our most heavily used transit corridors—we will make changes involving about 50 bus routes and 65,000 service hours. » [Learn more about the fall service revisions](#)

The fall service change will coincide with the elimination of Metro's Ride Free Area in downtown Seattle. In recent years, the RFA has led to a \$2 million loss in fare revenue annually. We are currently working with the City of Seattle on options to provide transportation assistance to people in the downtown area who rely on the many social services there and cannot afford bus fare.

At the same time the RFA ends—Sept. 29—Metro will change to pay-on-entry systemwide, reducing fare evasion and making fare payment simpler for our customers.

With the 2012 service changes we will be making better use of Metro's existing resources to improve service quality, address high-priority needs, and attract many more riders. We estimate that the September service revisions, along with high gas prices and an improving economy, will lead to a ridership increase of more than 750,000 rides annually.

It's remarkable that the Council adopted the extensive fall service revisions with little debate. One reason they had confidence in our proposals was our thorough public engagement program. Metro received more than 10,000 comments when we shared our service-change ideas with the public, and we used the feedback to improve our proposals. Another reason was our use of objective service guidelines, as you recommended.

Service guidelines

Last week the Regional Transit Committee (RTC) scrutinized our first-time application of those guidelines when it reviewed our [2011 Service Guidelines Report](#). This report describes how we

used the guidelines to set target service levels for transit corridors and to assess route performance and service quality. The report presents the results of these analyses, which informed this year's service change proposals.

At the RTC meeting we also discussed an upcoming process for refining the service guidelines to address how Metro should expand service when we are able to do so. Collaboration with local jurisdictions and the RTC will be key to this process, which will continue through fall and into next year. Proposed updates of the guidelines would go to the Council next April.

Alternative service delivery

We'll soon be releasing another document stemming from our new strategic plan: a five-year plan for alternative service delivery. We'll send this plan to the Council in mid-June.

As we crafted this plan, we listened to representatives of communities where we might provide alternative services. We held three workshops with stakeholders as well as a workshop with the RTC.

If you'd like to read the alternative service delivery plan, look for it in mid-June in our [Accountability Center](#) on Metro's website.

Funding

In the midst of all this activity, the County will begin collecting the \$20 congestion reduction charge (CRC) on June 1. This charge will yield about \$50 million to help fund Metro service over the two years it is in effect, providing the stability we need to continue making our system more efficient and productive. Our website has more information at www.kingcounty.gov/metro/crc.

The 2011 Legislature authorized the CRC largely because of the RTTF's work and the County's adoption of your recommendations. We were pleased that during the 2012 session, Gov. Gregoire and the Legislature's transportation leaders continued to address transportation funding needs. The Governor's Connecting Washington Task Force identified potential funding options. And both houses of the Legislature passed different versions of ESSB 6582, which would have given county voters authority to approve a one percent MVET to fund transit and other transportation needs. Although the bill did not get final approval, we made progress that we can build on next year. A long-term solution remains critically important as we still face a substantial funding shortfall after the CRC expires.

By the way, we are in the early stages of developing a new biennial budget that will determine how long will be able to maintain service with current funding. We'll get some help from the Legislature's approval of new fees that provide short-term funding for transportation statewide, including transit. Metro will receive 40 percent of the transit funding—about \$3.6 million in the current state biennium, 2011-2013, and \$10.4 million in the 2013-2015 biennium.

Ridership

Recent growth in transit ridership lends urgency to our efforts to improve Metro's service productivity and financial stability. Our ridership grew nearly 3 percent in 2011 and has been increasing at about the same rate this year (excluding the January snowstorm period).

Thanks to the policy direction and service planning tools recommended by the RTTF and adopted by the County, Metro is poised to meet growing demand and help our region thrive. I appreciate your ongoing engagement and support as we continue to strengthen the transit system.