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Metro Service Guidelines Task Force

Meeting Summary

April 30, 2015, 3:00 – 6:00 PM
Bellevue City Hall, Room 1E-108

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Task Force members present: Nancy Backus, Paul Bachtel, Amy Biggs, Vic Bishop, Josh Brown, Tim Burgess, Fred Butler, John Chelminiak, Dorene Cornwell, Lauren Craig, Mahnaz Eshetu, Jim Ferrell, Hilary Franz, George Frasier (by phone), David Freiboth, Patrick Green, Josh Kavanagh, Matt Koltnow, Scott Kubly, Matt Larson, John Marchione, Gordon McHenry, Lynn Moody, Shefali Ranganathan, Tom Rasmussen, Carla Saulter, Jon Scholes, Edna Shim, Jim Stanton; *Ex-Officio members:* Kevin Desmond, Mike Harbour; *Facilitator:* John Howell (Cedar River Group)

Members not present: Suzette Cooke, Chris Eggen

Presenters: Victor Obeso (Deputy General Manager, Planning and Customer Services, King County Metro), Chris O'Claire (Manager, Strategy Performance, King County Metro)

Welcome, Follow-up and Meeting Objectives

John Howell welcomed Doreen Cornwell as a new member of the task force, replacing Jonathan Porter as a mobility advocate representative. Mr. Porter found he was not able to attend the meetings. Ms. Cornwell served on the Metro Transit Advisory Commission. Task Force members introduced themselves.

The meeting agenda listed the upcoming task force meetings and topics to be discussed. If needed, there will be an additional meeting between the sixth meeting on June 16 and the final meeting in September-October. All meetings will take place at Bellevue City Hall from 3:00 to 6:00 PM. In response to a question about when the task force members will discuss what is and is not working in their community, Mr. Howell suggested that this topic be part of the discussion on social equity in this meeting and in the next meeting discussion on geographic value.

The "Meeting Requests and Follow-up Items" document in the meeting packet showed the list of task force members' information requests, and attached responses to the questions not yet answered. Metro had responded to the other requests at the previous meeting. The meeting packet also included a letter to the task force from the Lake Washington Institute of Technology in Kirkland, an article from the Mercer Island Reporter on a Mercer Island shuttle route, and a sheet explaining the definitions of "low-income" and "minority" that Metro uses in service planning.

Request: A task force member asked to receive the final meeting materials electronically to help in preparing for the meeting. The materials emailed before the meeting had been drafts. Jana Demas of Metro will send task force members an email before future meetings either attaching the final materials or linking to them on the task force webpage.

Social Equity in Metro's Planning Process

Victor Obeso presented information on the income and race/ethnicity of Metro riders, and how social equity is reflected in Metro's planning and service guidelines (see presentation slides, "Social Equity and Transit System Values"). Mr. Obeso noted that unlike many other transit systems, Metro's rider demographics closely reflect those of the entire county population. This is in part because of Metro's orientation to attract commuters.

Mr. Obeso provided the following additional information in response to questions:
- *Ridership by people of color:* There are 5 percent fewer people of color in Metro's ridership than in the county population. However, minority populations are more likely than the non-minority population to use transit for work trips.
- *Other demographic factors:* Metro does not include household size in its rider demographics.
- *Survey methodology:* Metro's Rider/Non-Rider Survey reaches a statistically representative sample of county residents. It is telephone-based. The contractor uses different methodologies to reach residents who have only cell phones.
- *Points assigned to corridors:* Metro is using census data about the income and race/ethnicity of the population living in the census tracts, and applies social equity factors by corridor. Corridors are assigned points based on how they relate to the King County average for income and minority status. Metro calculates the number of boardings on corridors and compares that to the systemwide average. In the 2014 analysis, five points were assigned to corridors when 63 percent of boardings occured in low-income census tracts or 51 percent of boardings were in minority census tracts.
- *Overcrowding:* Crowding is the first priority for service investments, whether or not the corridor is in a low-income or minority census tract.
- *Distance between corridors:* Some corridors do run parallel. Metro considers accessibility at the points of highest use in each corridor.
- *Service reductions:* In reduction scenarios, multiple factors are considered, including low-income and minority boardings, but also whether there are other parallel services.

Task force members made the following comments:
- *Low-income definition:* Metro should consider household size along with income for a truer picture of how many riders are low-income.
- *Methodology:* It is not clear that the methodology Metro uses is the right way to address social equity as it doesn't take into account the social equity factors for people who live in one location and work in another; for example, work in Issaquah but live in Kent. Also, the all-or-nothing approach to assigning points as either 0 or 5 does not capture the nuance needed.
- *Populations not included:* The measures Metro is using do not capture some populations that have historically been disadvantaged, including youth, the elderly and persons with disabilities.
- *Social safety net:* The measures seem to focus on productivity and do not address transit as a key part of the social safety net. An all-day network would provide more flexibility for low-income riders who do not have other transportation options and may be shift workers.

- *Destination tracking:* Adding data on destinations would help show the safety net needs by identifying the primary places people need to go for medical appointments, food, etc. The University of Washington is testing a technology to pick up mobile device signals to match origin and destination pairs anonymously. This kind of tracking might be helpful for Metro's planning.

Destination Data. Chris O'Claire described Metro's exploration of data on destinations using the Hoovers Dataset, which captures heath care facilities, retail stores, social services, grocery stores and personal services. Eighty percent of the facilities are within one quarter mile of a transit stop. Metro is considering ways to make this or other destination data sets useful in their analysis and decision making. One major challenge would be establishing some priority among the nearly 23,000 locations identified in the data base (i.e., hospitals vs. clinics vs. grocery stores vs. food banks vs. social services, etc.).

Ms. O'Claire and Mr. Obeso provided the following additional information in response to questions:
- *Job centers:* Data on jobs, schools, and colleges are included in the productivity analysis in the count of jobs and students.

Task force members made the following comments:
- *Proximity to transit stop:* Proximity to a transit stop alone does not necessarily address rider's access needs. Distance to a stop does not address issues related to topography or access for a disabled rider. The transit route and frequency should also be considered.
- *Low-wage jobs:* Although Metro accounts for jobs in the productivity analysis, low-wage workers should also be considered as part of social equity. Also, many low-wage workers work in prosperous communities and need transit to get to work.
- *Students:* The letter from the Lake Washington Institute of Technology points out that institutions of higher learning can be outside the dense corridors. This factor should be accounted for when applying service criteria.
- *Task force's charge:* Task force members questioned whether the discussion of destination data was useful for the task force's charge. Rather than asking whether there are better data available, the task force should look at whether the system for taking social equity into account is working. There was a suggestion that the conversation has raised two questions: Are the indicators adequate? Is the method of weighting appropriate?

Discussion: Desired Outcomes Related to Social Equity

Mr. Howell posed two questions: What is the social equity problem we are trying to solve? What outcome would the task force like to see with respect to social equity? In discussion, task force members offered the following thoughts:
- The social equity problem has three parts: the cost of the fare, access to the right places, and frequency of service that fits people's needs. It was suggested that the task force is not being asked to address the cost of the fare (which was just addressed through the adoption of the ORCA Lift Reduced Fare program).

- The definition should be to make sure that people with the least means have access to reach the services they need to lift them out of poverty into health and economic opportunity, i.e., jobs, school, health, social services and food.
- The definition adopted by the Regional Transit Task Force (p. 5.1 in the task force binder) should be the starting point. The issue is not whether the current system is meeting this definition but whether Metro has the right tools/indicators to measure social equity.
- Social equity goals are not being met if 44 out of 58 underserved corridors have been identified as having social equity factors (i.e. areas that have a high percentage of low-income, minority, or both).
- In addition to data and analysis, examine the effectiveness of engagement with the populations about whether they feel the transit system is meeting their needs. For example can people in the low-income and minority census tracts reach the service corridors?
- Suggest focusing on low-income census tracts and making stronger connections between low-income communities and the places they need to go.
- Transit cannot solve all the problems of poverty.
- We don't know if new metrics are needed until we know how Metro is doing with the current metrics.
- Focus on efficient investment of public resources and emphasize partnerships. If shift workers need a bus late at night, Metro should partner with the employer. The system works well for low-income riders in densely populated areas but not in outlying areas.
- The guidelines should serve the people who are the most transit dependent—youth, students, seniors, people with disabilities.
- The point system needs more gradation to capture nuance better.

Kevin Desmond noted that there are trade-offs. A growing ridership and crowded buses suggest there are unmet needs. In a system with constrained resources, the service guidelines are expression of the trade-offs. Any change in the guidelines will affect the resulting trade-offs.

Announcement

Mr. Desmond let the task force know that King County Executive Constantine would announce the following day that Metro will be able to add around 70,000 hours of service in September 2015 and March 2016 to increase service spanning the county. This is in addition to the 33,000 hours to be added to corridors serving Seattle because of the tax initiative Seattle voters passed. The service additions across the county are possible because of several factors: lower diesel prices; short-term improvement in sales tax revenues; cost control measures; an expected state grant to improve service on Route 522 and I-5; a set-aside for partnerships in Seattle's measure; and unused partnership funding from Transit Now. While these funding sources are not long-term, they can offer immediate service improvements.

Public Comment

One resident who attended the meeting questioned why there were no low-income residents participating and why the meeting began at 3:00 PM.

Next Steps

A task force member suggested that the key idea from the discussion at this meeting was that income is correlated to every part of social equity, so could be used as the key indicator. Mr. Howell added that other ideas suggested were to look at populations not served well who are not necessarily defined by low-income and minority (youth, seniors, people with disabilities), to allow for gradations in the point scoring, to make sure the planning process with underserved communities is effective, and that the planning process could incorporate information about destinations.

The next meeting will be on Thursday, May 21, from 3:00 to 6:00 PM at Bellevue City Hall, and will include looking at the values questions with respect to geographic value.