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To Councilmember Upthegrove and the members of the
Health and Human Services Committee

Thank you very much for inviting us here to speak today. I am speaking for myself but I am speaking as Chair of the WA Council of the Blind Environmental Access committee, as someone who has served on the SE Seattle Light Rail sounding board, the Transit Advisory Commission, and most recently the Service Guidelines Task Force. I live in Councilmember Gossett's district and I know that at least one other WA Council of the Blind member from East King County has also submitted comments.

The Environmental Access Committee strives both to educate WA Council of the Blind members about a wide range of transportation issues and to help chapters and individual members advocate effectively about transportation issues most critical for them.

*Public Comment at the
HHHS Committee meeting on
December 1, 2015*

I would like here to focus on two points related to my recent service on the Service Guidelines Task Force and then comment about some concerns related to specific other projects, and finally to offer a couple general observations.

Listening to all the participants in the Service Guidelines Task Force,

Blind and deaf-blind people and people with other disabilities need to be included in ongoing conversations as Metro restructures services and new services are developed including Alternative Service Delivery. It's great if some of these people are included because they are in work roles but it is also critical that these conversations reach out and listen to community needs as different jurisdictions collaborate to develop projects and local funding mechanisms such as the measures Seattle voters have approved.

Demand for Metro services is growing faster than funding streams.

Metro is trying to contain cost growth and to test new markets with a variety of alternative service delivery approaches.

Alternative Service delivery comes with the same ADA accessibility needs but does not carry the same ADA paratransit requirements as fixed route services. This MAY offer flexibility to better serve more people but will require focus to maintain King County's reputation for accessibility

and to meet the needs of paratransit users. Here I particularly want to express appreciation for the responsiveness of many Metro staff as people work to think about these challenging issues.

In some cases services are contracted out as a substitute for fixed route buses; in other cases alternative services are part of a progression that might include volunteer drivers and donated vehicles testing what demand actually is while developing funding streams.

The cost per trip of paratransit services in King County has been considerably higher than in other jurisdictions. Access is currently addressing the cost / trip by booking many more rides with multiple passengers in the same vehicle. This makes sense to me but I do not use Access and do listen to and want to take into account many other people who do use it.

The population eligible for paratransit services is growing and will need to get around whether King County implements new fixed route services that comes with ADA paratransit obligations or chooses alternative service delivery.

Second, to support the collaboration above, I am very pleased that the Task Force report includes my recommendation that Metro, local jurisdictions, and the PSRC coordinated Grants program develop some kind of framework for evaluating the accessibility of new forms of services. This framework should maintain King County's solid reputation for accessible services

including attention to vehicle characteristics, training of drivers, accessibility of bus stops, transit stations, customer service processes and many other elements that contribute to accessibility.

This may mean for example that the Disabled American Veterans cannot make do with someone's old donated van but it also means that a veteran who uses a wheelchair can have the same access to services as more ambulatory vets.

As an alternative example, perhaps projects supporting veterans' travel needs supplement their proposals for people who can use available vans with some kind of contract with providers who have wheelchair accessible fleets.

I think the Service Guidelines Task Force report offers a framework for continued improvement of transit services in our region, but I also think the process needs ongoing participation by members of our community.

Attention to accessibility needs when collaborating with other agencies such as Sound Transit:

The current design for the 23rd Avenue Station for the East Link, the stop closest to the Lighthouse is designed so that people either have to cross the tracks without adequate clues about safety issues or take paratransit or just not use the station in that direction.

There are other continuing concerns such as wheelchair accessibility on many Sound Transit buses travelling to Pierce County, noise and pedestrian environment around the Stadium and Sodo Light rail stations.

People who commute across the Sound by ferry to work will be heavily impacted by the accessibility deficits in the proposed waterfront design.

We can

More generally

Our region is growing: the Puget Sound Regional council estimates that a million more people will live in our region by 2040. Our transportation network is already in gridlock but a review of Puget Sound 2040 projections indicates a need to plan not only for commute cycle travel but also for local services connecting housing, shopping, medical services and community activities. Large Employers come for example to the state Transportation committee hearings two years ago on one hand asking for relief from congestion and on the other hand wanting tax breaks rather than offering to help generate funding for our transportation infrastructure.

Our population is aging. Many elders would like to age in place, in the homes and communities where they have lived for many years; others will need to make new choices about where they live but will need affordable housing, easy travel options for themselves or caregivers. Many elders should not

be driving now or will need to stop doing so, but that means their need for transit and paratransit as well as easily accessible goods, services, employment and volunteer opportunities will continue to grow.

I think our region can pull together and address all these needs.

Thank you all again for your time.

Dorene Cornwell