



## King County

### **Dow Constantine**

King County Executive

401 Fifth Avenue, Suite 800

Seattle, WA 98104-1818

**206-263-9600** Fax 206-296-0194

TTY Relay: 711

[www.kingcounty.gov](http://www.kingcounty.gov)

March 1, 2021

The Honorable Claudia Balducci  
Chair, King County Council  
Room 1200  
C O U R T H O U S E

Dear Councilmember Balducci:

This letter comprises the response to Ordinance 19210, Section 113, Proviso 7, relating to Metro service recovery from COVID-19 and information about proposed updates to Metro's Service Guidelines

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread in the community, King County and Metro faced unprecedented challenges. To promote public and employee safety, and respond to ridership declines and staff availability, Metro suspended some bus, DART, flexible, and water taxi services in March and April 2020 while also working to maintain and deliver a core network of services. In September 2020, Metro was operating about 85 percent of pre-COVID bus service levels. In March 2021, Metro plans to implement bus service restorations and additions to begin the path to service recovery that is expected to take place over multiple years.

The sections below respond to the proviso requirements.

### **Proviso Section A**

In light of the pandemic experience, proposed updates to Metro's Service Guidelines planned for this summer will include more specific information about how Metro will use the Guidelines in emergency situations that impact ridership or service levels.<sup>1</sup> While no policy can address all situations that arise in emergencies, Metro's proposed updated policies will outline how the department will approach such emergent situations, providing more clarity and transparency for future situations where Metro must rapidly change service.

Updates relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic will be proposed within the "Adding, Reducing, and Changing Service" section of the revised Service Guidelines. These proposed updates will

---

<sup>1</sup> [Ordinance 18301](#)

provide more clarity about how service will be planned and managed in emergencies including at minimum:

- A description of Metro’s emergency authority from the King County code section 28.94.010.B.2 into the section about major service changes.
- Information about how Metro should develop situation-specific policies when emergencies arise, in recognition that different emergencies would require different types of responses. This information will address Metro’s use of performance information from before and during emergencies to inform planning.
- Recognition of the need for Metro to have flexibility to immediately change service in response to emergencies.

### **Section A. 1.**

Metro is using a combination of quantitative data and qualitative community feedback to plan for proposed service restorations and service changes. Data includes pre-pandemic ridership and productivity measures. The measures are based in adopted policies outlined in the “Adding, Reducing, and Changing Service” section of the Service Guidelines. Additional factors related to the unique conditions of the current pandemic are also being used. Metro is committed to sharing information through tools such as the Dash, the digital rider dashboard,<sup>2</sup> that provide transparency about the transit system and routes.<sup>2</sup>

Table 1 below describes specific measures that Metro is using to plan for service recovery. Data is being gathered and tracked for each measure for each route or service that is impacted. The data is also being used to prioritize the order of service restoration. Metro is conducting community and stakeholder engagement at the same time, which is also being used to inform service restorations. Key points include:

- Ridership and productivity are measured as per the current Service Guidelines and will include use of measures reported in Metro’s 2020 System Evaluation report. Crowding is being tracked based on a modified definition of crowding due to pandemic driven load limits and will change over time as pandemic related requirements change. When load limits are no longer in place, Metro will use the definition of crowding set in the Service Guidelines.
- Equity is also measured in the current Service Guidelines, but with a two-factor definition based on low-income and minority populations. The equity measure Metro will use for recovery reflects a broader definition of equity using five factors, which responds to the Mobility Framework and will be reflected the upcoming policy updates. This broader definition of equity continues to include low-income and minority populations.
- The other measures are situation-specific measures and are not in the Service Guidelines.

---

<sup>2</sup> [Dash](#)

**Table 1. Service Recovery Analysis Data**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>How Metro will use the measure</b>
<i>Route-level Data</i>	
Ridership	Prioritize routes with higher pre-COVID ridership based on the 2020 System Evaluation Report.
Crowding	Prioritize restorations to mitigate identified crowding issues on service in operation. This metric will change as load limits change during COVID; current limits are 12 on 40' bus and 18 on 60' bus.
Equity	Prioritize restorations on routes with high opportunity scores defined based on the proportion of populations of persons of color, poverty/low-income, linguistically diverse, disability, and immigrant/refugee (born abroad).
Employers	Prioritize restorations on routes with high proportions of ORCA passport usage from major employers (e.g. Amazon, Microsoft, UW), when those employers indicate they may begin phasing out or reducing teleworking.
Productivity	De-prioritize service restoration on routes with low pre-COVID productivity based on the 2020 System Evaluation Report; based on higher probability of later permanent reduction based on Service Guidelines reduction priorities.
<i>Regional Demand Indicators</i>	
Governor's Safe Start Phases	Consider best available forecasts for vaccine availability and distribution.
Back to school	Engage with University of Washington, Seattle Public Schools, and other large educational providers to inform timing of returning demand
Back to work	Consider Metro employer and rider survey results, ORCA card usage and engagement with UW, Microsoft and Amazon. Major employers to inform expected trajectory of return of peak demand and need for peak commuter services.

While Metro has started and intends to continue using the above measures for service restoration, long-term decision-making regarding service levels will be based in existing King County policies in the Service Guidelines which set priorities for adding and reducing service. In addition, King County Code 28.94.020 provides authorization to the Metro director to make changes while also defining changes which are subject to approval by the Council. Thus, Metro cannot permanently delete routes or make long-term changes affecting service hours by more than 25 percent without King County Council approval.

**Section A. 2.**

As outlined in Table 1, Metro will consider information about COVID-19 related operating restrictions based on the Washington Safe Start Phases as well as other guidance from the state and public health. As indicated among the Regional Demand Indicators section, Metro will use employer, institution, and school trend data to help shape service plans. Finally, Metro will continue to coordinate with other partner agencies and entities, notably Sound Transit and the

City of Seattle, to ensure that service restoration, service additions, or service reductions are made in context of the regional transit system including upcoming system expansions.

**Section A. 3.**

The pandemic has not changed Metro’s long-term vision as outlined in Metro Connects, the agency’s long-range plan. The Executive does not intend to transmit proposed policy changes to Metro Connects specifically related to the pandemic. Metro Connects represents a vision for King County’s transit service more than 20 years in the future. Metro expects that well in advance of that time, economic conditions, population growth, employment, and other future conditions in King County will still require the robust transit network envisioned and developed through the current planning and policy development process. Metro Connects envisioned Metro providing an all-day network serving all kinds of trips and with less focus on peak commute periods, as evidenced by the expanded network of RapidRide, Frequent, Express, and local services. This vision remains strong and the ridership and other trends during COVID reinforce the need to serve trips throughout all times of day. Future updates to Metro Connects are expected over time and will incorporate any long-term changes that result from the pandemic.

**Proviso Section B**

Updates to the “Restructuring Service” section of the Service Guidelines are expected to be proposed later this year. The current Guidelines already provide clear direction on service restructures, including the prompts for considering restructures. The Guidelines include specific guidance for high-capacity transit expansion, goals of restructures, and elimination of service duplication. Current conditions, including the pandemic and funding challenges, do not affect the policies and goals for restructures outlined in the Service Guidelines

**Section B. 1.**

Service Guidelines policy update proposals will include suggested language to clarify policies around service restructures and service hour redeployment decision making. Metro budgets for service levels as part of the biennial budgeting process with specific changes and restructures administered through legislative and administrative processes. The budget process and proposed levels of service are affected by Metro’s finances, Metro policies such as the Service Guidelines and Strategic Plan, and Countywide policies such as the Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan, and the Strategic Climate Action Plan. For example, King County’s 2021-2022 approved biennial budget for Metro includes a variety of service level increases and decreases, including a reduction of approximately 47,000 service hours as Link light rail replaces the portion of Route 41 between downtown Seattle and Northgate. The 2021-2022 biennial budget process did not include any assumption about reduction associated with East and Redmond Link extensions because Metro is not the primary all-day service provider for the transit connections that will be most directly replaced by East Link. Sound Transit is the primary provider for the most directly duplicative bus routes and would make decisions on those services.

While Metro’s 2021-22 budget does not reflect a reduction of specific hours from the East Link project area as part of a restructure project, it is likely that area will be impacted by overall system-wide reductions and adjustments related to long-term revenue capacity and impacts.

Therefore, the East Link project area and its cities will likely see a net decrease in Metro bus service hours proposed alongside the increase of Link light rail service as part of system-wide changes. Because of anticipated long-term financial impacts and its structural deficit, Metro cannot commit to increased bus service levels with this project, however, the Link light rail investment represents a significant increase in overall transit service levels for the project area. Metro will conduct an extensive public and stakeholder engagement process to determine how existing King County-funded bus service resources will be redeployed, such as ending routes at Link stations rather than having buses travel between downtown Seattle and the Eastside, to best enhance mobility. The exact span and frequencies of future service will be determined through this process, which is currently underway.

**Section B. 2.**

Metro conducts extensive public and stakeholder engagement to develop proposed transit service changes. The “Restructuring Service” section of the current Service Guidelines provides clear guidance on how restructures are implemented, including specific language addressing ridership and transfers:

“...service restructures will have the goals of focusing frequent service on the service segments with the highest ridership and route productivity, creating convenient opportunities for transfer connections between services, and matching capacity to ridership demand to improve the productivity and cost-effectiveness of service.”

This language will be maintained for the upcoming proposed updates to the Guidelines.

**Section B. 3.**

In 2022, transit service changes to integrate service around the Link light rail extensions to the Eastside will be proposed. Metro will engage the public and stakeholders in this work. A set of changes will be proposed that reflects the full Link line which will open in two phases. Because Sound Transit will open light rail extensions in two phases on the Eastside, the proposed changes will include two implementation phases - with East Link in 2023 and Redmond Link in 2024 - in order to correspond as closely as possible with the two rail openings. Public and stakeholder engagement is underway and will include multiple phases of engagement to inform development of final transit network changes. This is similar to approaches King County has taken with past phased openings such as the initial Link line openings in 2009 and 2010. Metro bus changes will be planned to take place at the nearest service change after each Link line or phase opens.

**Section C**

We will continue to work closely and collaboratively with the King County Council, its committees, and the Regional Transit Committee on Metro’s planning and policy updates. Quarterly reports on COVID-19 service recovery, including how we are using the measures outlined in Table 1 above, will be provided to the Council’s Mobility and Environment Committee. We are pleased to provide briefings to Councilmembers on these or other issues related to service restorations, planning, and policy update processes as requested.

The subject matter addressed in this letter reflects the King County Strategic Plan mobility goal to deliver a safe, reliable, and seamless network of transportation options to get people and goods where they need to go, when they need to get there.

The Honorable Claudia Balducci


March 1, 2021

Page 6

This letter cost an estimated \$4,695 to prepare.

If your staff have any questions, please contact Christina O'Claire, Mobility Division Director, Metro Transit Department, at 206-477-5801.

Sincerely,

 for  
Dow Constantine  
King County Executive

Enclosure

cc: King County Councilmembers  
ATTN: Carolyn Busch, Chief of Staff  
Melani Pedroza, Clerk of the Council  
Shannon Braddock, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive  
Karan Gill, Director, Council Relations, Office of the Executive  
Dwight Dively, Director, Performance, Strategy and Budget  
Terry White, General Manager, Metro Transit Department