**Response:** Question of whether Metro has the *budget* to provide new, additional service hours beyond the U Link restructure and other system growth (to preserve Routes 71 and 43)

**Funding and Operational Capacity**

The current Metro financial program could fund new temporary service hours, however, Metro does not have sufficient buses or bus operators to deliver new significant levels of service beyond the approximately 10% system growth already planned in 2015-16. Key considerations for further service growth include 1) available funds, 2) operational capacity and 3) policy directives. Even with the continued improved financial conditions and potential use of one-time funds to provide a transition or phased change, the operating and fleet limitations prevent Metro’s ability to deliver significant added service levels at this time. Long term sustainable funding for service additions will require careful consideration in light of various issues including a fund management policy study related to reserves and fund balances, new capital needs, and other demands on the Metro system.

**Policy Direction**

When new resources are available for additional service hours, investment decisions would be guided by the policy priorities identified in Metro’s Service Guidelines in the following order:  1) passenger loads, 2) schedule reliability, 3) underserved corridors and 4) highly productive routes.  Specific investments would be identified based on information in the most current service guidelines report at the time decisions are being made.

Consistent with the Service Guidelines, through revision of current routes and reallocation of their service hours, Metro is able to address many current priority service investments including passenger loads, schedule reliability and underserved corridor needs in Northeast Seattle and Capitol Hill through this proposal.

**Below is additional background information related to the near-term addition of new service beyond the nearly 10% system growth already planned in the 2015-16 time period.**

Metro is unable to preserve Routes 71 and 43 as they exist today, on top of the service identified in the Link Connections proposal. There are a number of interrelated issues and constraints— operational, fleet and policy —that prevents Metro from delivering the level of service that would be involved in continuing the Routes 71 and 43 in their entirety.

**Operations**

In light of the existing and projected operator challenges, adding another 80,000 annual hours (the level it would take to preserve the full Routes 71 and 43), even for a temporary transition period, would be beyond Metro’s ability to effectively deliver.

As reflected in the table below, Metro has and is planning to add a cumulative nearly 347,000 additional service hours, through the combined Metro and Seattle funded Seattle-funded service adds in 2015 and 2016, plus additional Metro-operated hours that Sound Transit will be funding. This is in addition to adjusting from the previously planned biennial budget and retaining 250,000 hours in Metro’s system due to improved economic conditions. Prior to the improved economic conditions, Metro had been planning to reduce service and had been taking steps in that direction to reduce staffing and fleet.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Service Change** | **Annual Hours Added** |
| Summer 2015 | 103,000 |
| Fall 2015 | 131,300 |
| Spring 2016\* | 97,500 |
| Fall 2016\* | 15,000 |
| **TOTAL** | **346,800** |

**Note:** Includes 13,000 annual hours in Spring 2016 for Sound Transit. Sound Transit is proposing an additional 15,000 annual hours for Fall 2016.

These additional hours, on top of the retained service levels and the expanded light rail and streetcar services (which have pulled employees from the bus operator pool to rail operations) have stretched Metro’s ability to attain its target for bus operators needed to operate the system.

Metro has hired and promoted from part to full-time approximately 350 bus operators since last fall’s passage of an amended Metro budget and Seattle’s Transportation Benefit District transit funds. Metro still remains somewhat short of the hiring target for the Fall 2015 service change.  We are continuing to aggressively hire and train new operators to meet current service needs through March 2016.

The current operator shortfall has resulted in some service trip cancellations which are becoming more noticeable to customers.  Although Metro on the whole is delivering significantly more bus trips each weekday due to the service investments described above, cancelations anywhere in the system can reduce rider confidence in Metro as a reliable option to driving.

**Fleet**

Preserving the full Routes 71 and 43 as they operate today would require roughly 32 coaches, over and above the base fleet level planned for the Link Connections proposal and other service improvements. The current fleet projection for March 2015 is 1,512 buses. Our Vehicle Maintenance team has estimated that a ***maximum*** of about 14 40-foot buses could potentially be pulled into service by March 2016 to increase our active fleet. This means that Metro would not have the fleet availability to be able to preserve the full Routes 43 and 71 without a concurrent reduction elsewhere in the system. Any buses that are put back into service are ones that have exceeded their originally planned useful life by several years and may not be the right coach size for the route. To provide current service levels Metro has already retained or reinstated many older buses which has also increased costs as these buses require more maintenance in order to maintain reliability.

**Additional Policy Considerations for Routes 43 and 71**

In addition to the constraints noted above, there are relevant policy issues related to Metro’s Service Guidelines which would not be supportive of investing 80,000 available hours in routes 71 and 43.

Retention of Routes 43 and 71 would be inconsistent with Metro’s Service Guidelines, as noted below.

Route 43

Route 43 is inconsistent with the following Service Guidelines:

* Route spacing and duplication: Route 43 overlaps with other bus routes and Link light rail in the proposed new network on every segment it operates, with the exception of a relatively short segment of the E John St/E Thomas Street corridor, between 19th and 23rd Avenues E.
* Route directness:  Route 43 does not follow the most direct pathway between the U. District and Capitol Hill.  Route 49 between the U District and Capitol Hill, continuing to downtown Seattle, remains part of the proposed U Link restructure. Even though Route 43 is more direct from Montlake to Downtown Seattle than it would be to backtrack to use Link Light Rail, Route 43 is actually much slower and time consuming for riders than if they used Link Light Rail and Route 48.

Route 71

Retention of Route 71 would be inconsistent with the following Service Guidelines:

* Route spacing and duplication: Route 71 would overlap with multiple different routes in the proposed new network heading both to downtown Seattle and the University District as well as competing for riders with Link Light Rail between the U. District and downtown Seattle.
* Route directness: The most direct pathway from Wedgwood, View Ridge and Bryant to downtown Seattle will be for riders to take the proposed peak only route 76 via the I 5 express lanes and Green Lake Park and Ride in the peak periods or a bus straight to the University of Washington Link Station and then transfer to Link Light Rail.  Route 71 takes a longer pathway to reach downtown Seattle and therefore is slower in many instances than using a feeder bus route and Link Light Rail between these neighborhoods and downtown Seattle.

Metro would also be concerned that the performance of Route 71 will be similar to quasi-express Route 66 (which would be eliminated in this proposal) that has long been the lowest performing Northeast Seattle to Downtown Seattle route. Route 71 will not add any new connections to the currently proposed network and serves only to eliminate the need to transfer across the network.  Resources devoted to Route 71 would therefore come at the cost of improving other unique segments in the network.