

Boarding and Fares

Getting on the bus would be fast and easy.

We envision a comprehensive program to make paying fares and getting on and off the bus easier and faster—reducing trip times for everyone. Potential changes include simplified fares, new ways to pay fares, new ORCA partners with integrated payment, and new bus and stop designs.



Metro partnered with six other transit agencies in the Central Puget Sound Region to introduce the ORCA smart card fare payment system in 2009, and now we're preparing for the next generation of ORCA.

ORCA gives transit customers the advantages of faster fare payment and regional transfers. Transit agencies realize benefits such as faster boardings, more accurate ridership data, and improved revenue data and regional revenue reconciliation.

Vendor support for the current ORCA system will expire in 2021, and the ORCA agencies have begun planning for the next-generation fare collection system. Technology has changed significantly since the original ORCA system was designed, and the ORCA partners will be exploring opportunities to simplify fare payment for customers and speed up the fare collection process. Possible features include expanding mobile payment and simplifying the fare structure and product offerings.

What would boarding and fares look like?

The time a bus spends at stops to let passengers on and off can lengthen trip time and cause delays. Boarding can be slow and difficult for customers using wheelchairs, other mobility devices, strollers, or carts.

Fare payment takes time, as well. Boarding is slower when riders pay with cash rather than ORCA. Use of cash and paper transfers also elevates the risk of fare disputes and adds to Metro's operating costs.

To speed up boarding and make transit easier to use, Metro would pursue these strategies:

- Design fleet vehicles with low floors for easy boarding, especially for parents with strollers and riders who have disabilities.
- Procure vehicles with wider aisles and doors—including passenger-controlled rear doors—that make it faster and easier to get on and off.
- Provide safe and convenient securement areas for customers who use mobility devices.
- Install easier-to-use bike racks on vehicles.
- Speed up fare payment through fare simplification, all-door boarding, offboard fare collection at more stops, a "proof of payment" system that uses fare enforcement officers, and efforts to increase ORCA and other non-cash fare payment.
- Explore opportunities to enable customers to pay fares for all services used in a trip—such as parking, bikeshare and carshare providers, and TNCs—in real time with a single medium, such as a smartphone.



For more information

See the 2014 Transit Fares Report at www.kingcounty.gov/metro/accountability under the "Other" tab.

Some of these strategies are being used or are possible today:

- Metro’s RapidRide system lets passengers at stations pay their fares offboard and get on the bus through any door; fare enforcement officers may check for proof of payment. While installing on-street fare payment infrastructure at all of Metro’s 8,000 bus stops would be cost-prohibitive, we would evaluate ways to expand this approach—particularly where many passengers board. New technology could allow mobile payment at less-expensive onboard readers.
- Several Metro programs contribute to steadily increasing use of ORCA. The ORCA Passport business account program has greatly expanded the number of ORCA riders. In 2015, ORCA business accounts represented 30 percent of Metro’s boardings.
- Metro’s ORCA LIFT program, introduced in 2015, offers a reduced-fare card for riders who meet the income qualifications. It provides cost savings to participants and reduces cash fare payment on buses.

Technological developments could further expand options. However, Metro’s complex fare structure, including surcharges for peak and two-zone travel, limits the possibilities. Simplification of our fare structure could open up opportunities while making our fares easier for customers to understand. Fare policy changes would require a comprehensive review of Metro’s fare structure and approval by the King County Council.

Future changes to transit stops and stations in downtown Seattle could be identified through the Center City Mobility planning process.



Through a partnership with King County Public Health and other human service agencies, 30,000 customers had registered for ORCA LIFT by mid-2016. Metro will continue promoting and expanding this program.

Strategies like these will help Metro keep moving toward no cash payment on buses, though we would continue to provide fare products that customers could purchase with cash elsewhere.

What would it take?

- **Move toward all-door boarding** to make bus trips faster and enable Metro to provide more service with the same resources.
 - Change Metro’s fare structure to move toward a system without cash payment on the bus, as many other agencies are doing.
 - Work with ORCA partners to develop the next-generation ORCA system, making ORCA fare payment more convenient for customers by allowing them to use their mobile devices and credit cards for fare payment.
 - Make major investments in onboard and offboard fare collection equipment, and budget for more fare enforcement personnel.
 - Expand alternative payment methods and provide new fare purchase sites.
- **Make boarding easier and faster for all.** Improve boarding for wheelchairs through passive restraint systems, for bicycles through easier-to-use racks, and for strollers and baggage through vehicle design.
- **Work with partners on projects and policies that make boarding easier.**

Fig. 17: All-door boarding

