

Update on Metro's COVID-19 Response and Recovery

Regional Transit Committee and
Mobility & Environment Committee
June 17, 2020



Agenda

- Metro's pandemic response
- Recovery plans
- Budget and policy implications



Metro's Pandemic Response

- Metro has taken many actions to protect riders and drivers, including:
 - Implementing even more rigorous cleaning protocols on buses and at worksites
 - Providing masks for operators and personal protective equipment for all frontline workers
 - Temporarily suspending fares collection
 - Instituting rear-door boarding only
 - Operating on a reduced service network (while adding more trips on high-demand routes to minimize crowding)
 - Encouraging and now requiring passengers to wear masks



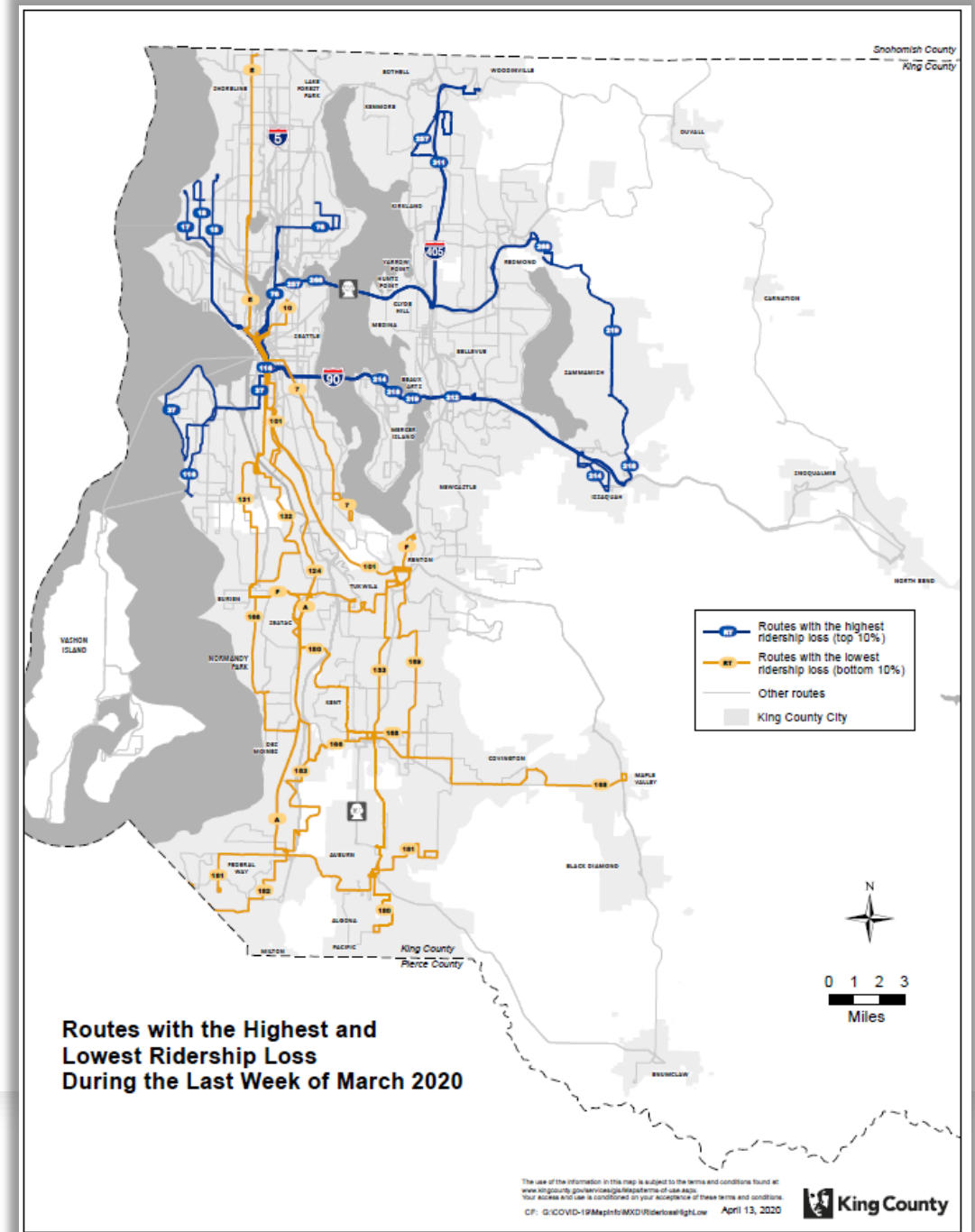
Metro's Pandemic Response (cont.)

- Metro has taken many actions to protect riders and drivers, including:
 - Encouraging passengers to ride transit for essential trips only
 - Expanding eligibility for Metro's Access program
 - Posting signs to cordon off seats to support social distancing
 - Instituting new passenger limits to promote social distancing
 - Promoting Public Health messages and guidance for customers on our system



Ridership Changes

- Ridership has decreased significantly (~71% avg systemwide) but has slowly started to climb again and is at ~124,000 daily trips
 - Highest decreases in morning and afternoon commutes
- Map showing routes with highest and lowest ridership losses gives Metro a sense of where need has been greatest throughout this crisis



Recovery Planning

COVID response called on all of Metro to adjust our way of business

Moving to recovery means getting clarity on what we will recover

- Support Metro's long-term vision and strategy to provide mobility
- Restore confidence
- Reflect fiscal realities in the years ahead

A Recovery Planning Team will make recommendations for short- and mid-term changes to keep employees safe, support our workforce as we transition into a new way of operating, adjust mobility services, and meet customer needs and demands during current operations and the recovery phase.



Recovery Goals & Objectives

- Develop a recovery plan and structure for the recovery planning process that is flexible to address emerging issues
- Build the recovery by phases with an ability to flexibly expand, adjust and contract for all components
- Ensure transparency by identifying clear triggers/milestones for when iterations of expansion and contraction occur
- All recommendations must fit within our budget reality, balancing each recommendation with other program changes & cost reductions



COVID Recovery Summer Service

- **As more industries reopen and restrictions are lifted, Metro plans to restore some service on June 22**
 - Make adjustments that respond to ridership and customer/community feedback
 - Restore service to some routes that saw reductions in late April
 - Achieve frequencies similar to early April
 - Continue Saturday network on a weekday schedule
 - Focus on all day routes rather than weekday peak service
 - Additional fallback service to address crowding over social distancing thresholds
 - No additional service changes until September, when Metro will restore about 50 routes, partially restore some peak commuter services, and continue to reduce and suspend many other services.
- Other Metro owned/operated modes will reintroduce service over summer, but not to pre-COVID levels
- **While a summer ramp-up is positive, the realities of revenue losses mean service levels in the coming years will be lower than before COVID-19**

Budget Impacts - Current Context

- **Goal: Recover from COVID-19 with a system that better addresses customer needs and reflects County values, including equity and sustainability.**
- **We want to engage you in our preliminary thinking on budget approach**
- Before COVID-19, Metro faced a shortfall of \$1B over 10 years.
- Revenue (esp. sales tax and fares) will be significantly impacted (more than \$1.5B) by a projected recession.
- Seattle may not renew the Seattle Transportation Benefit District this year and Sound Transit is reducing service levels.
- Metro will use CARES Act funding (~\$242M), as well as Fund Balance and Revenue Stabilization Reserves, to offset operations while we restructure and realign our delivery.
- **Even with these valuable offsets, we expect more than a \$2B deficit by 2028 that we must address.**

Local News | Puget Sound | Traffic Lab

Sound Transit, Metro facing big drops in funding as coronavirus downturn takes hold

March 19, 2020 at 7:09 pm | Updated March 19, 2020 at 8:01 pm



What We're Planning For

- **~20-30% net reduction and restructure of the bus network**, with 10% attributed to the likely need to phase out Seattle Transportation Benefit District funded service and the other 10% or more removed system-wide.
- **~30-40% reduction in the Capital Improvement Program** – achieved across all portfolios, with the range allowing for close coordination with the service network reductions, including a reassessment of the Rapid Ride Expansion Program and the pace of electrification and other capital investments
- **~5-10% reduction in all other programs and services.**

Future of Funding for Seattle's Metro Bus Service in Doubt



Guidance for Reducing and Recovering Service

- **Reductions and service recovery will be planned using existing policy guidance** until updated policies are adopted. Advancing the **Mobility Framework** also guides our decisions.
- **Reductions and recovery will be seen as an opportunity to “reset” and set the region up for a better system post-COVID.**
- **Other factors considered when reducing service**
 - Locations of priority populations (black, indigenous, and people of color, low-and no-income, people with disabilities, immigrants and refugees, limited-English speaking populations); and important destinations identified through qualitative and quantitative tools
 - Impacts to all areas of the county
 - Minimizing impacts through restructuring
 - Identified investment need on corridors (Service Guidelines & Metro Connects)
 - Preservation of last mile connections
 - Applicability of flexible, non-fixed route services
 - Partnerships (i.e. Seattle Transportation Benefit District status)

How Service Changes Will Align with Mobility Framework

- Use new and updated equity data and equity impact review tools (*the Mobility Framework is a priority for budget proposals*).
- Use Mobility Framework's definition of priority populations
- Preserve programs serving highly vulnerable populations such as the Community Access Transportation which serves many seniors.
- Consider sustainability through factors like preserving frequent service to support increased density, mixed use zoning, and affordable housing; and the net impact of Metro services on greenhouse gas emissions.
- Support reduced car use by providing frequent service.



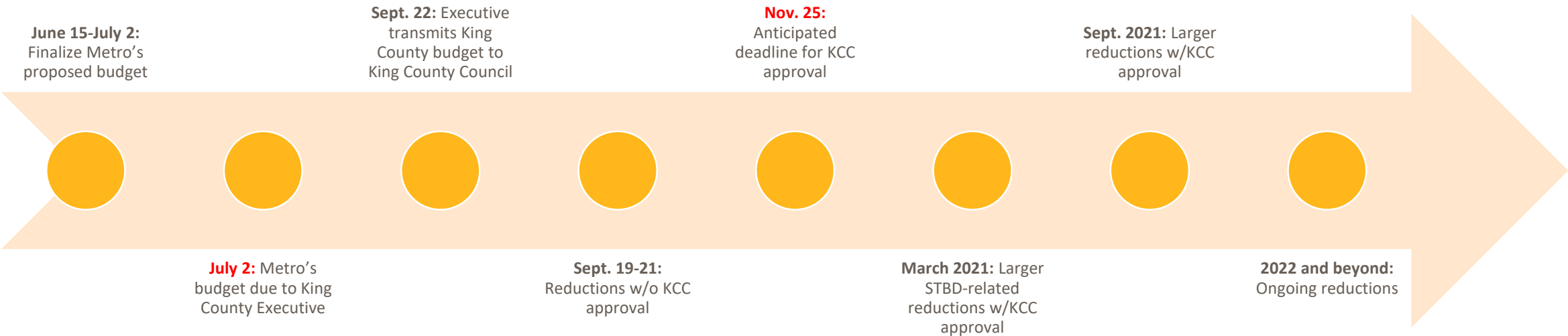
Guidance for Capital Reductions

- To achieve reductions of 30-40% in the Capital Improvement Program, Metro should first prioritize projects that:
 - Maintain operation of the reduced transit system
 - Support safety and security
 - Are necessary for legal requirements
 - Can be done within the 6-10 year CIP time horizon
- To the extent possible, Metro will also include projects that support Metro's values, including equity and sustainability, and advance key strategies
- **The Mobility Framework is influencing project decisions**



Timeline for Budget and Service Changes

- Teams are developing new budget assumptions and proposals. Metro’s budget is due to the Executive in July and the Executive will transmit the King County budget to the Council in September.
- Metro expects staggered restructures and reductions and will engage communities to the extent possible.



Community Engagement

- Budget-related service cuts are planned beginning in September 2020 and at each service change through at least the end of 2022.
- Metro's budget reduction outreach and engagement will include discussions on service, capital, and operational impacts
 - **Metro is still developing an engagement plan and timeline, but service change ordinance process schedule will likely drive Metro's engagement**
 - Challenges related to COVID-19 do not provide time for engagement best practices



Changes to Policy Update Timeline & Scope

- Given COVID-19, **Metro proposes transmitting updated policies by end of July 2021 (6-month delay)**
- Delay allows Metro to better address and engage deeper on key issues, including:
 - Targeted changes to the Metro Connects maps to align with current planning and Vision 2050
 - Recognition of COVID-19 and its impacts
 - Implications of Metro becoming a mobility agency
 - Consideration of ways to incorporate greenhouse gas emissions in to evaluation of service



Revised Policy Update Timeline (RTC, M&E)

2020 Month	Topic	2021 Month	Topic
June	COVID-19 Response & Implications	January	Strategic Plan – proposed changes
July	Strategic Plan performance measures workshop	February	Service Guidelines – proposed changes
August	TBD <i>(may be cancelled. Could do Service Guidelines)</i>	March	Metro Connects – proposed changes
September	Service Guidelines workshop: potential changes	April	Service Guidelines – proposed changes
October	Service Guidelines workshop: potential changes	May	<i>Could use as a final recap of policy updates, or non-policy update topics</i>
November	Metro Connects: final costing information, potential changes	June & July	Non-policy update topics (transmittal by July 31, 2021)
December	TBD <i>(may be cancelled. Could do additional Metro Connects)</i>	August	Begin review of updated documents

Closing and Questions