

## PSRC COMMITTEE FEEDBACK ON ACCESS TO TRANSIT

**In Brief:** As part of the implementation of the 2022-2050 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), PSRC staff have been working with relevant committees to help develop the agency's work program for access to transit. At its July 2022 meeting, the Transportation Operators Committee (TOC) discussed transit access and took a survey on their work related to improving access. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) took a similar survey at its May 2022 meeting.

The committee feedback received points to a few major challenges experienced by both local jurisdictions and transit agencies, including:

- Planning and coordinating across agencies and jurisdictions;
- Making access improvements in less transit-supportive areas;
- Navigating complex planning and implementation processes;
- Equitably serving different transportation modes and user groups; and
- Securing sufficient funding and other resources to achieve outcomes.

The committee feedback received to-date suggests that PSRC's upcoming transit access work program should focus on improving access by active transportation and transit connections. The work program could also address some additional modes, including mobility on demand/shared mobility, Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), ADA paratransit, and automobile access.

Committee members identified a few potential ways for PSRC to support local jurisdictions and transit agencies as they work to improve access, including:

- Clarifying stakeholder roles and responsibilities;
- Providing data, tools, and resources to support work by local agencies;
- Identifying regional priorities for access improvements;
- Improving regional metrics for tracking transit access; and
- Helping local agencies coordinate their long-range planning with the region.

For next steps, PSRC will gather additional feedback on how transit agencies, local jurisdictions and other stakeholders approach improving access to transit. Included in this will be outreach to the PSRC Regional TOD Advisory Committee at its September 16 meeting. This information will help highlight the greatest challenges they are currently facing, and potential opportunities for PSRC to develop tools and resources and other planning products for helping meet those needs. Committee members will continue to receive regular updates on the development and implementation of the transit access work program.

The following sections of the memo provide additional background information, and more detail on the survey results and other recent committee discussions relevant to the access to transit topic.

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## **Background:**

The VISION 2050 regional growth strategy includes a goal to attract 65% of residential growth and 75% of employment growth to regional growth centers and within walking distance of high-capacity transit station areas by 2050. The recently adopted 2022-2050 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) identifies improving access to transit as one of the key policy focus areas for achieving the regional growth strategy. Creating convenient and safe connections, particularly for bicyclists and pedestrians, will be critical for ensuring that transit is a viable choice for users as the regional population grows and the high-capacity transit system expands.

The RTP outlines a few key highlights of the work ahead for improving access to transit in the region. The focus will be on ensuring improvements that are safe, equitable and comfortable for all users, particularly in transit-dependent communities. Access improvements should be customized based upon the location and context of transit stations and stops. As improving access is a shared responsibility, it will be important to identify and engage with potential stakeholders about key roles and responsibilities throughout the planning and implementation processes.

Since the RTP was adopted in May 2022, PSRC staff have been working with the Transportation Policy Board to develop the agency's Transportation Planning work program to implement the plan. In addition to working with the board, staff have been gathering preliminary feedback from the TOC and BPAC to help inform the transit access work program.

## **TOC Transit Access Feedback and Survey Results:**

The Transportation Operators Committee held an open discussion about transit access at its April 2022 meeting, with a focus on providing feedback for PSRC's access to transit work program. Committee members generally felt that this work should center around supporting stakeholder coordination, tracking progress in meeting regional policy goals, and providing technical guidance, where needed.

More specifically, committee members suggested a few areas of emphasis for this work, including:

- Clarifying stakeholder roles and responsibilities throughout the process;
- Identifying bicycle and pedestrian facility improvement priority areas in the region that provide the most benefit for transit access;
- Improving regional metrics for tracking transit access;
- Providing or supporting tools and resources that facilitate implementation by local agencies; and
- Helping local agencies coordinate their planning work with regional plans.

At the July 2022 TOC meeting, staff conducted an interactive survey of committee members about their work in making transit access improvements, and on what they would like to learn more about from other stakeholders involved in the process.

Respondents generally played a few different roles in improving transit access. Most commonly they characterized their role as coordinating with other agencies on improving access in station areas. The next most common responses were that they work on designing and constructing access projects, or funding projects implemented by other agencies. A few respondents identified their primary role as working on community and business outreach.

For identifying access needs and gaps in station areas, respondents used information collected from customer/ridership surveys, or feedback from their partner agencies, including local jurisdictions, social service, and other transit agencies. For more quantitative data, respondents used U.S. Census data and their agency's current and projected ridership data, including forecasted demand. To collect data on access needs, respondents also collected data on facilities and other conditions in station areas.

Respondents used multiple factors to prioritize projects for improving access, including looking at ridership/trip generation, safety, human health, connectivity, passenger experience, and the needs of priority populations/areas. Respondents also prioritized projects based on their funding eligibility and the needs of their partner agencies.

In terms of the biggest challenges for improving transit access, responses included:

- Agency staffing and driver recruitment;
- Coordination between agencies;
- Complex planning and implementation process;
- Rapid growth and market uncertainties; and
- Securing enough funding.

For the greatest opportunities for improving transit access, respondents ranked access modes in the following order (greatest to least):

- transit connections,
- walking and biking,
- mobility on demand/shared mobility,
- transit-oriented development (TOD),
- ADA paratransit, and
- automobile access (parking or drop-off).

For respondents' biggest lessons learned for improving access, respondents described the importance of early and frequent coordination with other stakeholders and the public. This included working with local jurisdictions, social service agencies, transit workforce partners, and members of the public through outreach activities.

When asked what questions they have for local jurisdictions, respondents were looking for more information about how jurisdictions design the street network for transit. They also mentioned the topics of permitting, coordination, and sidewalks.

### **BPAC Transit Access Feedback and Survey Results:**

PSRC staff engaged with the BPAC on the transit access topic throughout the development of the RTP, with a more focused discussion at the November 2020 meeting. As part of that discussion, committee members provided some general feedback on how the RTP should address transit access, as well as some specific suggestions for future PSRC work in this area, including:

- Supporting coordination of different stakeholders on facility planning;
- Assessing the availability of bicycle and pedestrian accommodations at stations and on vehicles; and
- Reviewing current policies/guidelines/regulations for facilities in station areas.

At the May 2022 BPAC meeting, PSRC staff conducted an interactive survey of the committee, similar to the TOC survey, but tailored more specifically to active transportation.

Respondents most commonly characterized their role in improving transit access as planning, designing and/or constructing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. The next most common role was working on transit facilities and operations. Some respondents identified their role as advocating for public access improvements; while a few others said their primary responsibility was coordinating stakeholders and public outreach.

For identifying bicycle and pedestrian facility gaps in station areas, agencies usually identified gaps by collecting data on facilities in station areas and then analyzing the resulting information. Agencies often conducted this data collection and analysis as part of a larger planning process, or when applying for grants. Other respondents said they identified gaps based on feedback from the public or their partner agencies.

Respondents used a variety of factors to prioritize projects for improving active transportation access in station areas, with many using a multi-factor approach. The most cited prioritization factors were safety, equity, connectivity, and funding eligibility. Other factors included proximity to priority sites, station boarding volumes, and the needs of partner agencies.

When asked about the biggest challenges for improving transit access, the most cited responses were:

- Changing the current roadway to accommodate transit and active transportation, while also continuing to serve vehicle users;
- Accommodating transit and active transportation in low density or rural areas, particularly in areas lacking frequent transit service;
- Planning and coordinating with other jurisdictions, especially across transit and jurisdictional boundaries; and
- Securing enough funding and other resources for making improvements.

For respondents who had previously worked on transit access, their biggest lessons learned included:

- The public is strongly supportive of most improvements. Connecting to safety needs helps generate stronger public support;

- Access improvements are effective at increasing the number and diversity of riders;
- It is challenging to balance different goals, such as safety and mode shifts;
- Better alignment is needed between transit agencies and local jurisdictions;
- Transit agencies are limited in their capacity to address streetscape improvements; and
- It is difficult to secure funding for access projects, so agencies should pursue multiple sources to maximize their chances of success.

In preparation for future convenings of different transit access stakeholders, the survey asked respondents what questions they have for both transit agencies and local jurisdictions:

- For transit agencies, the questions broadly related to how transit agencies consider active transportation access when planning their routes and operations. Specifically, respondents requested information on how transit agencies collect bicycle and pedestrian facility data, prioritize station area facility improvements, and coordinate with local jurisdictions on planning and implementing projects.
- For local jurisdictions, the questions most related to how jurisdictions prioritize bicycle and pedestrian projects for improving transit access. Respondents were also interested in the funding and other resources (e.g., technical guidance), local jurisdictions may need for effectively planning and implementing projects.