



FIRST ANNUAL REPORT ON

Transit Coordination in the Central Puget Sound

Setting the Context

The past several years have brought numerous financial challenges to the region's public transit agencies. Reduced sales tax revenues brought on by the Great Recession have forced most agencies to reduce services, cut staff and other expenses, raise fares, seek new revenue sources, and strive for even greater levels of efficiency.

This new fiscal reality has forced transit agencies to quickly adapt and position themselves for long-term financial sustainability. As cuts have occurred, transportation services provided by private operators and human services organizations have stepped up to fill many of the gaps. For example,

several of the region's employers are providing privately funded transportation operations that complement the region's public transportation system by connecting employees to major employment sites.

Transit agencies have had to make difficult choices while finding creative solutions to continue meeting the needs of as many riders as possible. These challenges have also crystallized the need for strong coordination efforts to leverage the knowledge, experience, and best business practices of transit providers across the region.

Purpose and Intent

Coordination among transit agencies is essential to the delivery of useful and productive transit service in the region. While there are many reasons for having multiple transit agencies, strong coordination and collaboration maximizes customer service, increases ridership, and optimizes the resources taxpayers have invested in the regional transit system.

The purpose of the Report on Transit Coordination in the Central Puget Sound is to increase awareness of ongoing transit coordination activities by highlighting coordination that is taking place and by describing service and performance improvements resulting from coordination. The topics covered here represent just a fraction of the breadth of coordination that occurs in the region, not only between transit agencies themselves, but including local jurisdictions, WSDOT, and community groups. The region's transit agencies see coordination as integral to a high-performing transportation system.

This report reviews existing institutional structures in place for transit agency coordination in the region and describes

specific coordination efforts between transit agencies. This is the first of what will be an annual report to the Transportation Policy Board (TPB) on transit coordination in the central Puget Sound region. This report was prepared under the direction of the Puget Sound Regional Council's Transportation Operators Committee (TOC).

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Forums for Transit Coordination



There is a long history of transit agency coordination and collaboration in the region between public transportation agencies, passenger ferry operators, and other agencies with an interest in transit service delivery and long-range transit planning. The following are forums that support ongoing transit agency collaboration in the region:

Transit Executives. Transit executives regularly meet to discuss and coordinate on policy and funding issues, project and service delivery, and short-term and long-term transit planning. Issues currently under discussion include sustainable funding sources for transit (possibly as part of a statewide transportation package) and transit representation at PSRC in response to guidance from MAP-21.

Transit Integration Group. The Transit Integration Group (TIG) was formed in 1998 to move toward integration of the regional transit system by focusing on priority issues and guiding principles that include ease of use for customers, policy coordination and cooperation, and smooth and coordinated system performance among others. The TIG has a number of subcommittees that address specific coordination topics, such as service and facilities planning, operations, and accessibility.

PSRC Transit-related Committees. PSRC has several committees dedicated to coordinating on issues of common concern to transit agencies. The Transportation Operators Committee (TOC) is a standing committee of the PSRC Transportation Policy Board, and represented on the policy board by a non-voting member. The TOC is PSRC's primary forum for addressing transit-related long-range and short-range transportation planning topics in the region. The TOC has two standing sub-committees to inform and support their work on specific technical topics (the Special Needs Transportation Committee and the Regional FTA Caucus).

PSRC also convenes a larger regional task force, encompassing transit agencies found in nine western Washington counties to address the needs of the Regional Reduced Fare Permit (RRFP) Program. In addition to these committees, transit agencies are also represented on a variety of other standing and project-based PSRC committees.

The cumulative impact of transit agency involvement in PSRC committees is to include the best available transit information in regional plans and policies, and to provide regional and peer agency insight into transit agencies' plans, policies, and projects.

In addition to the various forums for transit coordination, King County Metro, Community Transit, and Pierce Transit jointly use facilities with Sound Transit and actively plan, schedule, and operate Sound Transit's express bus service. This arrangement demands close coordination and benefits customers by matching local transit service schedules to Sound Transit schedules and helps lead to a more seamless transit system.



Improving Wayfinding and Signage

Many transit trips in the region cross jurisdictional and transit agency boundaries. Other trips are taken by people new to the region who may be unfamiliar both with the transit system they're using and the area they're traveling to. As a result, wayfinding and signage require strong coordination in the face of specific challenges to ensure that both frequent and new transit users can easily get where they want to go. Challenges are most acute at transit hubs, which serve tens of thousands of people daily, are often the site of operations for multiple transit agencies, may host multiple types of transit service, and may be located in a facility operated by a jurisdiction or entity that doesn't even provide transit service.



Transit agencies coordinate on signage and wayfinding during the three yearly service changes and in response to customer needs and requests. Also, Sound Transit has recently updated its customer signage design manual to improve customer information, wayfinding, maps, and signage across the system, with additional site-specific improvements at three important transit hubs: Westlake Station, Sea-Tac Airport and Airport Station, and King Street/International District Station. Implementing this work will continue in close collaboration with partners across the region, with improvements rolling out in preparation for the 2016 opening of University Link and the Angle Lake Station.

In addition to these near-term enhancements, significant rider information upgrades recently occurred along 3rd Avenue in downtown Seattle. The installation of electronic transit kiosks that provide real time bus arrival and departure information is part of an agreement and partnership between the City of Seattle, King County, and the Downtown Seattle Association to improve transit and streetscape infrastructure along this vital transit corridor. In all, nine kiosks will be activated as part of this coordinated effort.

Working Together on ORCA and Fares

The transit agencies in the central Puget Sound region have developed the ORCA system: one of the most closely integrated interagency transit fare systems in the United States. ORCA (which stands for "one regional card for all") allows a customer to ride the services of all transit agencies seamlessly, with allocation of farebox revenue to the various transit agencies automatically.

The ORCA partner agencies meet on an ongoing basis to discuss all aspects of fare coordination, including timing of fare changes, consideration of new fare media types, discount policies, compliance with changes to Federal Transit Administration (FTA) fare and pricing regulations, fare equipment purchases and new market development. The ORCA partners are also closely integrated in delivery of fare-related pass sales to businesses and organizations.

In 2013, the TIG's Fare committee continued its comprehensive, region-wide ORCA marketing campaign; developed a coordinated, region-wide calendar for changes to ORCA; collaborated on the development and purchase of portable ORCA card sales devices; and worked on developing a new ORCA regional day pass for in-service testing that will begin in spring 2014. The cumulative impact of this work means that people in the region will have more options to use the system in a seamless and reliable way.

In addition to coordination through ORCA, the agencies also coordinate on changes in fare policy. Recent coordination efforts include: discontinuing the Ride Free Area in downtown Seattle; the process of beginning to charge fares on the currently free Tacoma Link system; Metro's low-income fare study, which included analyzing Kitsap Transit's experience with a low-income fare; and expanded efforts to update the Regional Reduced Fare Permit Memorandum of Understanding.



Regional Transit Coordination for Downtown Seattle

In October 2013, executives from Community Transit, King County Metro, Seattle Department of Transportation, Sound Transit, and WSDOT's Public Transportation Division signed a charter "to support collaborative work to coordinate transit service and enhancements in downtown Seattle over the next ten years and beyond."

Transit agencies already actively collaborate around service to downtown Seattle in preparation for the three annual service updates, primarily through the TIG's Service/Facilities Planning and Operations committees. Because so many trips originate and end in downtown Seattle, this coordination is crucial to the success of all transit agencies in the region.

This decision to develop a charter, as well as a vision, goals, and objectives, is driven by major construction projects that will impact downtown Seattle over the next ten years, including the new SR-99 tunnel and demolition of the Alaskan Way Viaduct, the opening of

University Link, the end of buses using the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel, the Northgate Link Extension, and the completion of East Link.

These agencies have developed a work plan and a decision hierarchy that consists of: Solution Teams, which are responsible for coordinating around key projects and issues; a Planning Team, which supports Solution Teams and external communications and briefings; a Management Team, which provides overarching direction for developing recommendations, guiding work elements and Solution Teams; and an Executive Committee, which provides executive direction and authorizes resources.

Staff from the charter agencies are currently developing a recommendation to transit agency management to initiate this solution-driven process, including allocating resources, and creating a schedule to address these issues.



Increasing Access to Transit

Transit agencies have a vital interest in how riders access their service. People arrive to transit in many different ways: from walking to a bus stop near their home, to riding their bike to light rail, commuter rail, or ferry terminal, to driving to a park and ride. Making sure that transit riders can easily get to and use transit service solidifies the role of transit as a reliable transportation choice.

Access to transit is not only about providing adequate infrastructure and facilities that make getting to bus stops, transit stations, and park and rides easier, it's also about understanding the markets for transit, the purpose behind the decision to use and how to access transit, and the environment in which transit service operates.

A number of studies are beginning to examine the issue of transit access and involve the participation of multiple transit agencies:

- Sound Transit will begin implementing a parking management pilot in 2014 to increase the number of transit riders per parking stall at crowded transit facilities. Pilot elements include parking permits, increasing rideshare collaboration, and providing real-time information about parking availability. Project elements will be implemented in at least nine transit centers and park and rides in Snohomish, King, and Pierce counties.
- WSDOT, in partnership with Sound Transit and researchers from Penn State University, are conducting a regional parking study that looks at how individuals

arrive and depart from large regionally significant transit parking facilities, with an interest in learning about incentives that would encourage less single-occupant vehicle parking at transit facilities.

- King County Metro and Sound Transit are collaborating on a study that will assess potential and priority locations where right-of-way improvements can increase walk and bike access to bus stops for Rapid-Ride lines and other major routes in King County regional growth centers, as well as Sound Transit stations and transit centers.
- King County Metro was directed by the King County Council's Regional Transit Committee to undertake a study of access to transit with particular attention given to the role of park and ride lots and other infrastructure that supports access to transit.

Finally, PSRC's transit planning work program identified topics relating to improving transit operations and access along existing and planned transit corridors, with the intent of developing an assessment of regional transit access needs and identifying potential recommendations to incorporate into the 2018 update of Transportation 2040. This effort will use the above identified studies and plans as a foundation and will require collaboration and coordination from the region's transit agencies to be successful.



Long Range + Comprehensive Planning

Planning for the future of transit and the regional transportation system is an area that sees active and engaged collaboration, both between transit agencies and the jurisdictions they serve, and among the transit agencies themselves. Transit agencies regularly prepare Transit Development Plans (typically covering a six-to ten-year period), which establish the needs and necessary resources to improve efficiency and effectiveness to the public. Even in the

midst of unprecedented service reductions, agencies created plans that led to the most efficient transit deployment.

In addition to these shorter-term plans, transit agencies across the region either have developed or are beginning to develop and implement long-range plans, which set a strategic vision for future planning, operating, and funding for transit service. These plans require coordination not only with the jurisdictions served, but also WSDOT, the Puget Sound Regional Council, the FTA, and other transit agencies. Sound Transit must maintain a long-range plan by law and is currently beginning the process to update it. Community Transit created its first long-range plan in 2009, identifying Transit Emphasis Corridors that will serve as the backbone to their future route network and proposes a planning framework to guide their development. King County Metro is building upon its recently developed Service Guidelines to prepare a longer-range transit plan, and Pierce Transit is also beginning to develop a long-range transit plan.

Transit agencies recognize that the success of future transit service depends on smart and engaged land use planning at the local level. And local governments recognize that good transit is supported



by land use patterns that support demand for transit, along with infrastructure that improves access and service delivery. Transit agencies, with funding support from the Growing Transit Communities project, are supporting local jurisdictions that are updating comprehensive plans by collaborating on a transit supportive toolkit that identifies key elements of transit-supportive planning and provides important contacts and resources. The goal of the toolkit is to provide local jurisdictions with a go-to resource for incorporating transit-supportive elements in their comprehensive plans and, if realized, create and expand the conditions that support successful transit service.

Transit Planning at PSRC



PSRC's transit planning work is supported in part by Federal Transit Administration Section 5307 funds to implement a work program in support of transit in the region. The work program was developed with input of the Transportation Operators Committee and was reviewed and approved by the Transit Executives Group. It is meant to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the region's transit agencies and add value to the service provided by the region's transit agencies.

Elements of PSRC's transit planning work program include:

- **Development of a future transit network.** The next major update of Transportation 2040 will occur in 2018 and will include a new alternatives analysis and a new horizon year for the region's long-range metropolitan transportation plan. The current plan uses a transit system based on 2006 service and performance. Much has changed in the region since 2006, not least of which was a dramatic economic recession that has acutely affected transit agencies. An optimized future network would reflect the current status of the region's transit agencies as well as updated future land use estimation data, and will be developed in cooperation with the region's transit operators.
- **Regional transit oriented development (TOD) implementation.** This work builds off the Grow-

ing Transit Communities project to expand beyond light rail transit station areas and will look at other transit areas, including commuter rail, bus rapid transit, streetcar, ferry terminal areas, and other high-capacity transit investments in the region. The work program will focus on internal work to

align PSRC's regional plans, procedures, and materials as determined by PSRC policy boards and external collaboration to expand TOD opportunities in corridors and transit communities throughout the region.

- **Regional transit-supportive corridor and transit access assessment.** This element consists of several interrelated topics associated with improving transit operations and access along existing and planned transit corridors in the region. One task will involve working collaboratively with local jurisdictions and transit agencies to identify transit-supportive infrastructure needs and incorporating them into transportation, capital facilities, and other elements of comprehensive plans. Another task will be to develop an assessment of regional transit access needs and identify potential recommendations to incorporate into the 2018 update of Transportation 2040.
- **Transit tools/data products.** This effort continues previous PSRC work in the development of an activity-based model that is much more detailed in its representation of transit networks, both geographically and in terms of the specific transit mode (light rail, streetcar, local and express bus, etc.). The model will improve PSRC's long-range planning practice as well as assist the region's transit agencies in developing and updating their own long-range plans.