WSDOT Frequent transit service study

Policy advisory group meeting 2 summary
2:30-4:00 p.m., August 2, 2022

Attendees

PAG members

- Amy Asher (Mason Transit)
- Celeste Gilman (WSDOT)
- Justin Leighton (WSDOT)
- Paulo Nunes-Ueno (Front and Centered)
- Angie Peters (Valley transit – Walla Walla)
- Anna Zivarts (Disability Rights Washington)

Project staff

- Don Chartock (WSDOT)
- Thomas Craig (WSDOT)
- Emma Dorazio (PRR)
- Monica Ghosh (WSDOT)
- Kate Gunby (PRR)
- Jade Henderson (PRR)
- Justin Nawrocki (WSDOT)
- Stan Suchan (WSDOT)
- Emily Watts (WSDOT)

Discussion

Slide numbers included in this meeting summary refer to the PAG meeting 2 presentation saved on engage.wsdot.wa.gov/frequent-transit-service-study.

Slides 1-4

Kate Gunby welcomed the PAG members and led a round of introductions. She then went over the meeting agenda and reviewed the outcome of the July 11 PAG meeting in which the group:

- Confirmed that there is insufficient sidewalk data to determine who in Washington State is within a one-half mile walk to transit
- Advised the project team to continue the work using the data available
- Recommended that the project team include jurisdictions in the process

Slide 5

The project team reviewed outcomes from the last Technical Advisory Meeting (TAG). The TAG confirmed WSDOT's finding about sidewalk data limitations and confirmed the need to use proxy data to determine how many people in Washington live within one half mile walk of frequent transit.

The PAG discussed the use of proxy data:

- WSDOT is working with Puget Sound Regional Council and King County Metro to learn about best practices for the application of sidewalk network proxy data. Proxy data is needed because existing sidewalk data is not accurate and precise across the entire state of Washington. Proxy data will allow the project team to gather accurate data and build precision over time. More information about the proxy data will be available in future meetings.

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- There are limitations to using U.S. Census data to determine where Washington State residents live within a half mile of a fixed route transit stop. Census tract boundary lines often conflict with county lines and transit agency service boundaries. Census tracts are often very large in less populated rural areas, resulting in less precision. Finally, insufficient data about sidewalks, walk-ways, and pedestrian barriers between residents' homes and the nearest service will reduce the accuracy of the data. The project team will qualify the research methods with these limitations during reporting efforts.

WSDOT is interested in proposing an initiative to gather better data to improve study efforts like the Frequent Transit Service Study in the future.

Slide 7

WSDOT shared the following project approach:

1) **define** frequent fixed route transit and accessible frequent fixed route transit,
2) **document** gaps to frequent transit, particularly for certain demographics, using currently available data (census data, General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) data), including proxy data for walkability information. We will research and work with you to identify the appropriate proxy data to use to estimate the number of people within census tracts containing or near frequent transit stops.
3) **develop** a recommendation to the legislature as to how we could *get* the walkability data we need to answer these questions more accurately and precisely.

The PAG members all agreed to continue with this approach. The group also discussed the reporting timeline and confirmed that the approach will be applied to the draft report due to the Legislature by December 15, 2022. The draft report will be a foundation for the final project report due to the Legislature by June 30, 2023.

Slide 10

The project team presented an example to visualize the approach of mapping multiple levels of frequency. By defining multiple levels of frequency and showing all of them across the state, WSDOT will provide relevant benchmarks in all areas, and let each local community decide how those benchmarks should be defined.

The PAG discussed this approach. The project team does not have proposed measures for the different levels of frequency and will share more information about the distinct aspects of frequency that can be incorporated into these definitions in later conversations. In this meeting, WSDOT wants the PAG to share feedback or consensus on the approach of having multiple different definitions of frequency.

- The PAG sees value in providing a continuum, or multiple definitions, of frequency in recognition that different scenarios are appropriate in different places.
- The group discussed the drawback of defining basic levels of service that do not align with "frequent" being applied to a high standard of service. However, lifeline services are still worth recognizing. Even services that come once or twice a day provide freedom to their riders. The definitions should clearly define level of service, whether it is lifeline or basic access to mobility freedom, which is critical to rural riders, and where there is dependable or frequent access. To this purpose, service descriptions like "hourly" or "10-minute" might be more informative than "frequent" and "highly frequent." While we do not

want to establish definitions that become inaccurate, by defining once-a-day services as frequent, we also do not want to create a scale that creates a system that incentivizes shrinking service areas to provide higher levels of services to fewer people.

- The PAG emphasized the importance of tying these definition systems to real life outcomes. The report should clearly measure how many people have access to frequent and accessible transit and where. In other words, the data should clearly benchmark frequent transit conditions in the state.
- Types of service are also important to acknowledge in this report. Transit access is not captured by measuring fixed route transit alone. Though the proviso language directs this team to measure access to fixed route transit, the project team will clearly describe this limitation.

Slide 11-16

The project team shared how the proposed approach to defining frequency addresses major concerns shared by stakeholders and opened the conversation to feedback.

The PAG discussed of the rising cost of living in areas served by frequent transit. Economic factors often push people out of transit-supportive areas and into resource-low areas. WSDOT referenced this issue in the 2016 Public Transportation Plan chapter on the suburbanization of poverty and its effects on transit in the final report.

Slide 17

WSDOT presented five different components of frequent transit - headway, span, days, seasons, and routes, and asked the PAG to identify which components the project team should or should not consider in their analysis.

- The group determined that each component is important to consider in the analysis, and that variations in each component can be aligned with the different levels of service or frequency definitions. However, the group also determined that headway, span, and days will be the most important components to consider.
- The effect of overlapping routes on service frequency will be the most difficult to measure, especially when the overlapping routes are servicing different destinations.
- The group also discussed the importance of including demographics, specifically population density, on the map to contextualize where basic or lifeline services may be more appropriate than highly frequent services. However, the group also determined that this report is not the place to implement a land use lens to identify locales that are transit supportive.

Slide 18

In summary, the project team reached consensus for moving forward with multiple definitions or layers of frequency. The definitions, frequency components, and levels of service will be developed further in the process. The PAG wants to avoid setting a standard of frequency that is too low, allowing all transit to be seen as frequent transit, without setting the expectation that very frequent transit is a broad strokes solution that will work for all areas of the state. WSDOT heard many great considerations to include in the report, if not the analysis. For example, acknowledging services other than fixed route transit and the economic factors that push people out of transit-supportive areas and into resource-low areas. The PAG members generally agreed that all five frequency components should be considered to some extent in definitions of

frequency. However, headway, days, and span are the most frequently emphasized needs from the public.