



WSDOT Frequent transit service study

Policy advisory group meeting 5 summary
1:30-3:30 p.m., January 24, 2023

Attendees

PAG members

- Amy Asher (Mason Transit)
- Angie Peters (Valley Transit – Walla Walla)
- Dave Catterson (Joint Transportation Committee)
- Justin Leighton (WTA)
- Karl Otterstrom (Spokane Transit)
- Paulo Nunes-Ueno (Front and Centered)
- Tom Hingson (Everett Transit)

Project staff

- Don Chartock (WSDOT)
- Hansini Munasinghe (PRR)
- Jenny Thacker (PRR)
- Justin Nawrocki (WSDOT)
- Kate Gunby (PRR)
- Katy Asher (PRR)
- Monica Ghosh (WSDOT)
- Sahas Sok (WSDOT)
- Stan Suchan (WSDOT)
- Thomas Craig (WSDOT)

Discussion

Slide numbers included in this meeting summary refer to the [PAG Meeting 5 presentation](#) saved on engage.wsdot.wa.gov/frequent-transit-service-study.

Please note, this document refers to goals or goal setting and that path forward was changed during the March 6, 2023 meeting. Please reach out to Monica Ghosh, the study’s project manager, if you have any questions.

Slide 1 and 2 – Jenny Thacker

Jenny welcomed the Policy Advisory Group (PAG) members and led a round of introductions.

Slide 3 – Jenny Thacker

Jenny described the meeting objectives:

1. Review accomplishments from Phase 1.
2. Review final report deadline, requirements, and decision-making structure.
3. Review and provide feedback on the framework for describing gaps in transit access based on population demographics.
4. Provide feedback on different frameworks for approaching the funding scenarios.

Slide 4 – Jenny Thacker

Jenny reviewed the study purpose and schedule. In 2022, the Legislature directed WSDOT to:

- Define “frequent fixed route transit”
- Identify how many people live within a half-mile walk of transit



- Analyze where gaps exist to these types of transit, particularly for certain demographic groups
- Provide potential funding scenarios to address the gaps

During Phase I, the PAG and Technical Advisory Group (TAG) supported WSDOT in defining six levels of transit frequency and produced an analysis of populations living within a half-mile of frequent fixed route transit.

Lacking sufficient statewide active transportation infrastructure data, WSDOT, the PAG, and TAG determined it would be difficult to accurately determine the coverage of accessible walking routes to frequent fixed route transit stops. To address this data limitation, WSDOT included recommendations for further data collection in the Phase I report.

During Phase II, WSDOT will identify gaps in accessible frequent fixed route transit, analyze those gaps for disparities in race, age, disability, and potentially other categories, and develop funding scenarios to address the identified gaps. PAG and TAG members will help inform this work, which will result in a final report due to the Legislature by June 30, 2023.

Slides 5 and 6 – Jenny Thacker

Jenny reviewed the roles of stakeholders, the PAG, the TAG, the Joint Transportation Committee (JTC), WSDOT executives, and the WSDOT project team. Feedback and contributions from these stakeholders are important and will shape study processes and outcomes. The final decision-makers for this study are members of WSDOT executive leadership.

Jenny also reviewed the working agreements of the PAG, rooted in the goal to create more access to public transportation and improve mobility with an emphasis on the needs of vulnerable populations in overburdened communities and tribes.

Slide 7 – Thomas Craig

Thomas reviewed key tasks and challenges for Phase II of the study, and how the PAG will support WSDOT in addressing study challenges.

Slide 8 – Thomas Craig

WSDOT worked internally and in consultation with subject matter experts to propose the path forward:

1. Calculate the number of people from each demographic group who have access to each level of frequent fixed-route transit.
2. Use the results as the current statewide 'benchmarks' of fixed route transit access.
3. Select a goal for each calculated benchmark in the statewide analysis table.
4. Define the 'gaps' to accessible frequent fixed-route transit as the difference between the calculated statewide benchmark and our goals.
5. Explore and discuss disparities through a narrative format which will supplement and clarify the analysis.
6. Define a 'funding scenario' as the estimated cost to provide service that eliminates that gap.
7. Calculate the overall cost estimate to address the defined gaps in frequent fixed route transit. (Process is yet to be determined).



Slides 9 and 10 – Thomas Craig

Thomas reviewed a table of current transit service benchmarks, detailing the population of the state that lives within a half-mile of frequent fixed-route transit at each service level defined during Phase I, including population counts for specific demographic groups listed in the proviso.

Thomas invited PAG members to inform the fixed route transit service goals, relative to the benchmarks, that should be achieved for each demographic group by a given timeframe. Using the benchmark and goals, WSDOT will calculate the gaps. By exploring disparities through a narrative format, we will fill in details and local context.

Discussion

PAG members noted that “No Fixed Route Transit” may mislead readers to the conclusion that those individuals have no transportation options, while in reality, these goals are in conversation with other public transportation goals. The WSDOT study team will add narrative information about the parallel goals for improving public transportation options in areas where fixed route transit may not be the most effective solution.

The WSDOT study team clarified that the proviso does not include a method for identifying gaps and, as a result, WSDOT is proposing defining gaps by setting goals to compare against the current service level benchmarks.

PAG members discussed what kind of narrative and context is needed to describe how individual communities will be contributing to the statewide goals. WSDOT will work with the PAG and TAG to develop this narrative for the final report.

Slide 11 – Paolo Nunes-Ueno and Jenny Thacker

Jenny invited Paolo Nunes-Ueno to share information about the legislation currently proposed by Front and Centered based on the work completed in Phase I. Jenny stated that WSDOT is not endorsing these goals, but rather using them to demonstrate the kinds of goals that could come out of this process, and to allow Front and Centered to get real time feedback.

Front and Centered’s proposed legislation encourages the legislature to set statewide frequent accessible transit goals and direct WSDOT to:

- Set local agency level goals
- Create funding scenarios to meet those goals
- Study the unique needs of rural areas
- Collect sidewalk data to set a 2024 baseline for accessibility improvements

Discussion

PAG participants requested that any resulting legislation clearly define the party responsible for sidewalk data collection and accessibility improvements.

One PAG participant asked about the statewide and local agency level goals and requested that the legislature be encouraged to set goals based on measurable data metrics. Paolo shared that the goals will be informed by the on the state’s greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.

Paolo clarified that he presented this information to the PAG solely in order to gather feedback, and that these goals do not represent WSDOT’s goals.



Slide 12 – Thomas Craig

Thomas reviewed the proposed approach for identifying funding scenarios. Based on discussions internally and with subject matter experts, the WSDOT study team proposes defining “funding scenarios” as cost estimates. The WSDOT study team presented two approaches to develop the cost estimate:

1. Use established process from WSDOT Unmet Needs Assessment to calculate price per trip
2. Develop a new cost estimate methodology

Discussion

PAG members discussed the pros and cons of using different units of account for the cost estimate, including

- cost per one-way service mile,
- cost per fixed route passenger, and
- cost per fixed route transit station.

Participants noted that cost per passenger measures demand-side cost rather than supply-side costs. One PAG member suggested trying multiple methodologies.

PAG members requested that the WSDOT study team select a methodology that incorporates the costs of operations and capital infrastructure, including vehicle fleets and facilities, with an acknowledgement that inflation and supply chain issues might influence the accuracy of the cost prediction over time. The cost of operations and capital investments could be included as separate line items, supporting goals to share information about the factors that must be considered when planning expanded service scenarios.

PAG members suggested incorporating a visual depiction of the level of capital investment needed for service growth along a spectrum.

PAG members also noted that local jurisdictions have long range capital plans, and new service goals may conflict with current assumptions for local capital growth needs.

Finally, PAG members expressed concerns about the accuracy of the cost estimates. Specifically, participants shared concerns about using public transportation costs to answer questions specific to fixed route transit and the level of certainty communicated in the final report. The WSDOT study team will share cost estimates as ranges to avoid presenting false confidence and will add narrative context describing the level of assumptions needed to devise the funding scenario in the final report.

Slide 13 – Monica Ghosh

Monica shared next steps for the PAG and the WSDOT study team:

- WSDOT will bring the proposed process to the Technical Advisory Group on February 3 for consent.
- WSDOT will incorporate PAG and TAG feedback to develop draft goals.
- WSDOT will host one on one meetings with PAG and TAG members to get feedback on goals.
- WSDOT will invite PAG and TAG members to a joint meeting in early March to discuss final goals and work towards consent.