

WSDOT Frequent Transit Proviso study

Policy and technical advisory group joint meeting 6
2 - 3 p.m., March 6, 2023

Participants

PAG and TAG members

- Amy Asher (Mason Transit)
- Angie Peters (Valley Transit – Walla Walla)
- Anna Zivarts (Disability Mobility Coalition – Disability Rights Washington)
- Brad Windler (Skagit Transit)
- Dave Catterson (Joint Transportation Committee)
- Justin Leighton (Washington State Transit Association)
- Hester Serebrin (Transportation Choices Coalition)
- Karl Otterstrom (Spokane Transit)
- Lindsey Sehmel (Pierce Transit)
- Melissa Gaughan (King County Metro)
- Paulo Nunes-Ueno (Front and Centered)
- Steffani Lillie (Kitsap Transit)
- Tom Hingson (Everett Transit)

Project staff

- Coby Zeifman (WSDOT)
- Emily Watts (WSDOT)
- Emma Dorazio (PRR)
- Jenny Thacker (PRR)
- Kate Gunby (PRR)
- Monica Ghosh (WSDOT)
- Stan Suchan (WSDOT)
- Sahas Sok (WSDOT)
- Thomas Craig (WSDOT)

Summary

Slide numbers included in this meeting summary refer to the [PAG and TAG joint meeting 6 presentation](#) saved on engage.wsdot.wa.gov/frequent-transit-service-study.

Slide 1-3 – Jenny Thacker

Jenny welcomed the Policy Advisory Group (PAG) and Technical Advisory Group (TAG) members and led a round of introductions before reviewing the meeting objectives:

- Discuss and develop a common understanding of what level of support exists for proposed goals to identify gaps in access to fixed route transit.
- Discuss and arrive at a level of support for cost estimate methodology.
- Discuss final report's approach to costs and essential elements.
- Discuss next steps.

Slide 4 - 5 – 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.

The original legislative language noted that WSDOT is to define and identify gaps and analyze disparities but does not provide guidance on methodology. In order to complete this analysis at a statewide level, using existing data and our frequent transit framework, the project team worked with the advisory groups to come up with this path forward:

- Calculate the number of people who have access to each level of frequent fixed-route transit. The results will serve as the current statewide benchmarks of fixed route transit access.
- Develop and select goals for each benchmark.
- Define gaps to accessible frequent fixed route transit as the difference between the benchmark and goal.
- Disparities will be discussed through a narrative section in the report which will supplement and clarify the statewide goals and gaps work.
- Calculate the overall cost estimates to address the gaps in frequent fixed route transit.

Slide 6 - 8 – Jenny Thacker

Jenny reviewed the draft goals, which the project team reviewed with participants during 1:1 interviews in the month of February, and the frequency developed with support of the PAG and TAG during Phase I of this project.

Currently, 35% of people in Washington have no access to fixed route transit. The draft goals for this study pertain to fixed-route transit only, which is not necessarily the best way to increase transit access in all areas. For that reason, the project team is proposing an additional goal which is to increase access to demand-response public transit such that 90% of all people in the state have access to either fixed-route or demand-response transit.

Since the 1:1 interviews, the project team adjusted the presentation of the draft goals, but did not change the goals themselves.

One participant commented that the proviso did not task the project team to define goals. The project team is using the word “goal” to define the gap between where we are now and where we want to be in 2033. The project team will provide additional opportunities to inform the narrative of the report near the end of the meeting.

Slide 9 – Jenny Thacker

During the month of February, the project team reviewed the draft goals with PAG and TAG members and gathered feedback. Jenny presented a high-level summary of the main themes identified from the interviews:

- Most said that they could live with draft goals, with caveats.
- Most said that they supported significant increases in public transportation (i.e., fixed route and other modes for all people in Washington).
- Most said that the 10-year timeframe was unachievable in the current environment.
- Most said that project staff needed to explain why they chose the goals.

- Most said that population and land use are strongly related to fixed-route transit availability and frequency and that these issues should be discussed together.
- Most said that they had questions or concerns about where money would come from to fund goal implementation.
- Many said that they were okay with focusing the biggest increases in fixed-route transit on levels 1-3.
- Many said that they were okay with smaller increases of fixed-route transit at levels 4-6 and the use of demand response or other forms of public transportation to address gaps.
- All interviewees said that the draft goals would be expensive to achieve and implement, estimating the cost in the billions of dollars.

PAG and TAG members asked clarifying questions and shared feedback on the interview findings. The project team clarified that, in relation to the feedback we received, participants were comfortable with larger increases in Level 1 – 3 service compared to Level 4 – 6 within the context of the additional goal to increase demand-response service. Some PAG and TAG members requested that the final report acknowledge the preference of some participants to emphasize investments in Level 4 – 6 service. These participants noted that the current strategy could be interpreted as improving existing frequent services rather than providing new frequent services in areas that are lacking.

Slide 10 - 13 – Jenny Thacker

The project team presented two revised draft goal proposals that incorporate feedback from the 1:1 interviews with PAG and TAG members

Both options adjust the timeframe from 10 years to 15 years and revise the format from table to bulleted list, which will support our goal of sharing information at a high level to convey the limited level of precision in this type of statewide analysis.

Option 1

Over the next 15 years:

- **Increase access to Level 1 and 24-hour transit in the state by 300%**, based on the % of people with access
- **Increase access to Level 2 transit in the state by 100%**, based on the % of people with access
- Increase level of access by one level for people covered by levels 4 through 6
- Provide level 5 or 6 service to 10% of the people with no access to fixed-route transit today
- Provide an on-demand service to 90% of the people with no access to fixed-route transit today

Option 2

Over the next 15 years:

- **Increase access to Level 1 and 24-hour transit in the state by 200%**, based on the % of people with access
- **Increase access to Level 2 transit in the state by 150%**, based on the % of people with access
- Increase level of access by one level for people covered by levels 4 through 6
- Provide level 5 or 6 service to 10% of the people with no access to fixed-route transit today
- Provide an on-demand service to 90% of the people with no access to fixed-route transit today

PAG and TAG members discussed the proposed updates to the draft goals and shared additional feedback for the project team to consider.

- Participants expressed discomfort with the term “goal,” noting that the proviso tasked the project team to define gaps and that “goals” could potentially be interpreted as unfunded, unattainable, or mandated solutions. PAG and TAG members noted that the issue is semantic, not methodological. The project team will incorporate this feedback to reframe the gap analysis using vocabulary that supports a “problem first” narrative.
- Participants recommended a follow-on study to further develop solutions, in alignment with local long-range planning, for the gaps identified in this report.
- Some PAG and TAG members shared support for ambitious and exciting service level goals to emphasize the importance of public transportation for the daily lives of Washingtonians, rooted in the concept of transit mobility and the equitable outcomes that could follow.
- Others acknowledged that it may be difficult to set goals of universal access to public transportation for this project since the scope is limited to fixed route transit, excluding other services that contribute to transportation mobility. The project team is proposing a follow-on study to better analyze service gaps in public transportation services broadly.
- Participants asked questions about how the study team calculated the draft goals. The legislature did not define gaps or funding scenarios, nor did it provide methods for calculating these items, reference points, or benchmarks. The chosen approach was co-developed with the PAG and TAG and uses goals that approach service levels WSDOT would be proud to deliver.
- Local politics often constrain the potential for service expansion, creating a disparity between the transit that riders need and the service that voters are willing to fund. Other constraints include staffing, ridership and demand, funding, and capital infrastructure needs. The project team will plan to acknowledge these constraints in the report and will be seeking support from the PAG and TAG to frame this narrative.
- PAG and TAG members expressed support for a menu of scenarios, differentiating regions within and without Public Transportation Benefit Areas (PTBAs); large urban, small urban, and rural areas; or constrained and unconstrained systems.
- Participants also explored how the draft goals may interact with equity goals, some sharing concerns that improved services in dense urban areas will increase displacement risk and others noting that transportation is a social service that supports equitable outcomes. One participant suggested recommendations to include a displacement analysis in follow-on studies.
- The project team will explore gap disparities based on race, income, age, and disability status in a narrative section of the final report, separate from the gaps analysis and funding scenarios. The disparities analysis will include an overview, an explanation of methodology, and raw data sets.

Noting that they did not reach consensus or consent on the draft goals, the project team will plan next steps for goal development and return to PAG and TAG members for additional feedback.

Slide 14 - Thomas/Jenny

Thomas reviewed an update on the cost estimation methodology. The study team is considering estimating cost per person served, cost per route mile, and cost per stop. Each method has a different unit of account and will consider the costs of operational expenses, capital investments, service expansion, and paratransit services.

The project team was tasked to provide a cost estimation to the legislature. Despite concerns about the level confidence in the estimation, the result will support an understanding of the economy of scale that would support transit mobility, in context with other constraints uncovered through the advisory group process.

Participants suggested describing the value or benefit that increased frequent and accessible transit service will bring to communities across the state in conversation with the cost estimation.

PAG and TAG members will follow up with the project team via email to share additional feedback on the cost estimation methodology.

Slide 15 - 16 – Jenny

Jenny outlined elements the project team will include in the final report:

- Estimates to achieve goals, calculated using two different methods
- Estimates presented as a range
- Descriptions of the level of confidence in the estimates
- A discussion of key changes which need to occur to achieve goals, such as land use modifications, to create enough population density to successfully run more fixed route transit

The project team then invited feedback from PAG and TAG members to inform how the findings and constraints will be framed in the final report. Participants requested that report include acknowledgement of the following:

- Ambitious electrification goals conflict with service expansion goals due to resource and infrastructure constraints.
- While fixed route transit is not a universal solution for increased transit access, it is reliable, more convenient, and preferred by many riders compared to other public transportation services.
- Hiring, staffing, and training needs for transportation service providers are creating a major constraint. PAG and TAG members suggested inviting the legislature to consider steps that might support this challenge.
- Vehicle procurement and capital infrastructure needs will also constrain service expansion.
- The proviso was not designed to include feedback from riders and transit dependent community members, who can speak to the lived experience of service gaps in their communities.

Slide 17 - 18 – Monica

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

- Project team will develop cost estimates.
- Project team will discuss if additional meetings are needed and will report back.
- Project team will develop draft of the report which will contextualize cost with other elements and areas for discussion which will help achieve goals.
- Final goals and cost estimates will be presented for discussion, feedback, and consent at a meeting in early April.