

King County Metro Research Program

Regional Transit Committee
February 19, 2025



Why does Metro do research?

How Research Fits Into Metro's Guiding Policies



- Helps meet the goal to be responsible stewards of financial resources and invest in line with values and goals



- Calls for strengthening of Metro's learning and impact
- Research informs required dashboards

Mobility Framework

THE LONG GAME



A mobility agency that connects people and communities



Roadmap to continuously improve, innovate, engage, and show the value of transit



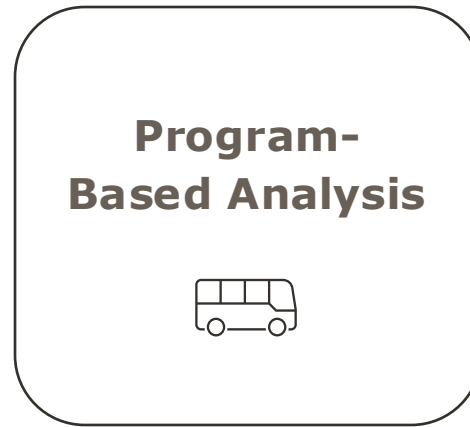
Vision of the future co-created with community

Research Program Vision

1. Metro has sufficient data and research to:
 - Confidently assess program and policy outcomes
 - Understand impacts for people and places
 - Make improvements that help advance the Long Game
2. Data and research guide plans and decisions
3. Metro teams have access to tools and resources to pursue high-quality research, evaluation, and learning



Research enriches Metro's data & evidence landscape

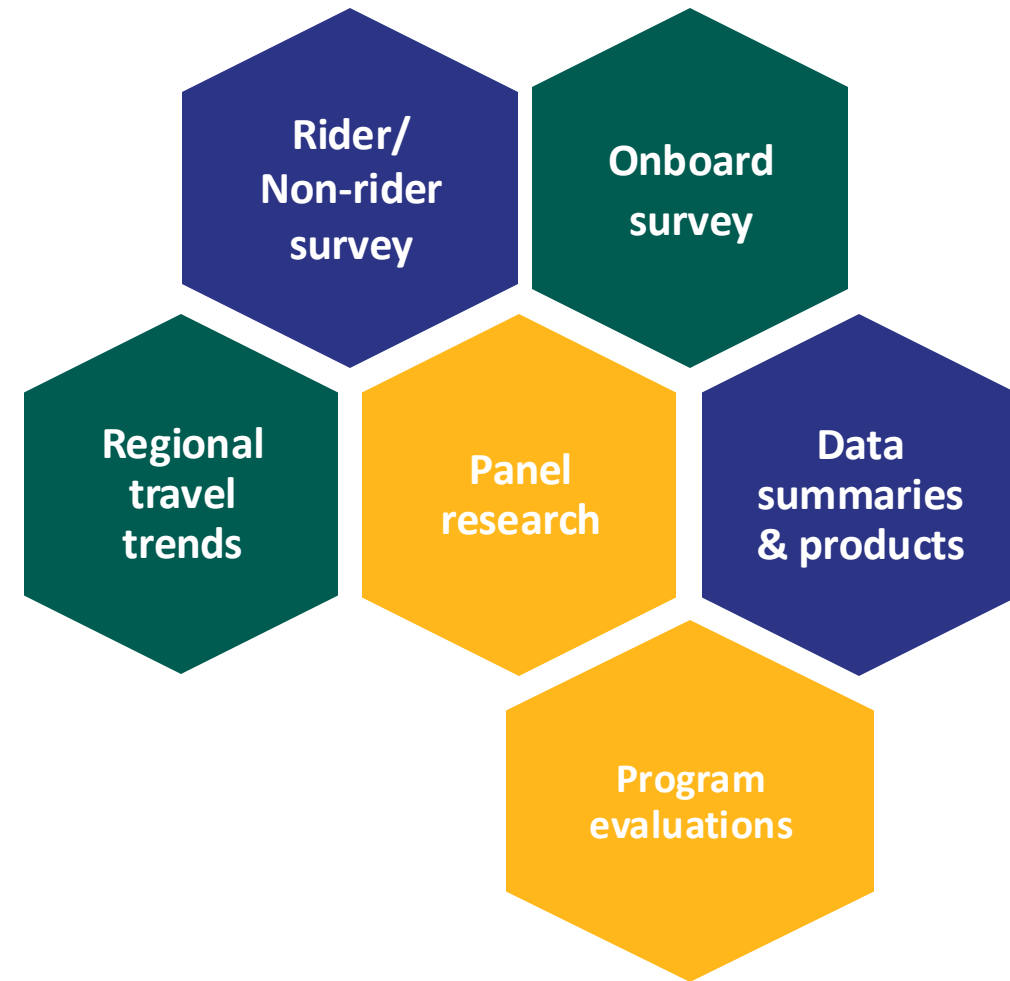


- Develop outcome data, customer-focused data, data to guide solution design & improvement
- Develop data products and tools to answer teams' and leaders' key questions
- Build capacity to gather and use data

How does Metro gather data?

Six Ways Metro's Research Team Delivers Customer Data

1. Rider/non-rider survey
2. Onboard survey
3. Panel research
4. Regional travel trends (LOCUS)
5. Program evaluations
6. Data summaries and products



Rider/Non-rider Survey

- **Purpose:** Understand travel behaviors, transit use, attitudes and experiences with transit across King County
- **Methods:**
 - Random sample of King County addresses
 - Oversampling of Census Block Groups with higher concentration of priority populations
 - Oversampling of multi-family dwellings
 - Survey implemented twice per year; ~2000 responses per wave



Regular and Supplemental Topics

Regular topics

- **Travel behaviors**—modes, commute behaviors, youth transit use in household
- **Transit use**—transit services used, frequency of use, trip purpose, barriers to transit use
- **Transit experiences**—satisfaction with elements of service
- **Transit attitudes**—perceptions of friends' and family transit use, what people hear in the news, interest in riding more

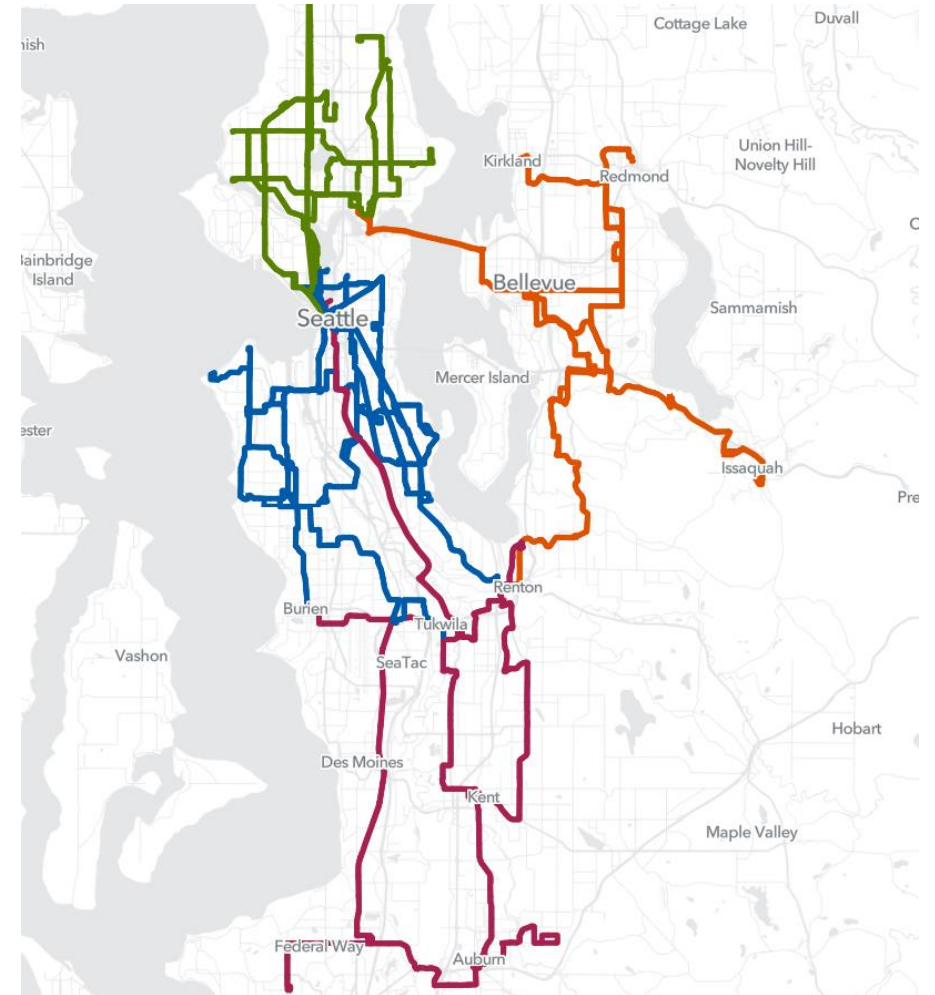
Supplemental topics (examples)

- Fares, trip planning, transfers, incentives for future transit use, transportation security



Onboard Survey

- **Purpose:**
 - Develop clearer understanding of current ridership, transit perceptions and experiences, and boarding behavior via additional data from bus riders
 - Reduce barriers to survey participation by meeting people where they are
- **Methods:** Sample of 27 Metro routes:
 - 15 highest ridership routes (60% of fixed route ridership)
 - All RapidRide routes
 - Routes that serve schools
 - Routes that have high ridership relative to ORCA use
 - Routes that represent all regions of King County



Onboard Survey Implementation

- 7,010 boardings tallied
- 2,384 surveys started, 1,693 completed (electronic + paper)
- Most surveys completed online and in English, but significant participation via pen/paper and in-language
 - 14.4% of surveys completed on paper
 - 7.2% of surveys completed in languages other than English
 - 109 surveys completed in Spanish



Panel Research

- **Purpose:**
 - Obtain timely input from specific residents and transit customers
 - Enrich evidence for planning and decision-making
- **Methods:**
 - Interviews
 - Focus groups
 - Focused surveys
 - Travel diaries
 - User testing



Panel Research in 2023-2024

Participants

- ~200 people per year, representing multiple identities and experiences; opportunities to hear specific perspectives for topics of interest
- Quarterly honoraria, per-study compensation

Nine studies completed—some examples:

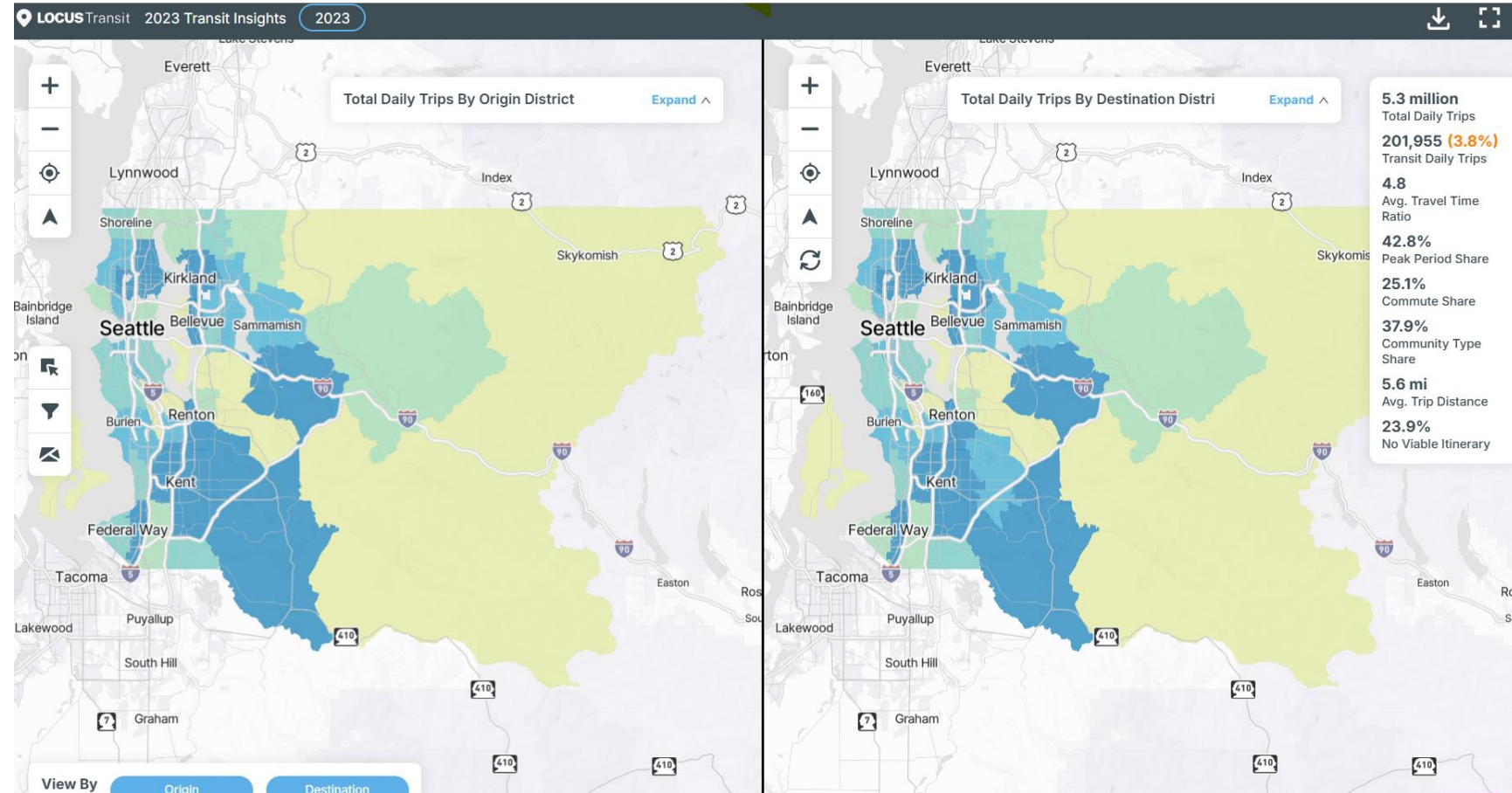
- Transit attitudes and behaviors among South and East King County residents
- Non-cost barriers to transit for low-income customers
- Perceptions of RapidRide design features, onboard and offboard
- Experiences leaving comments via the King County Metro website
- Testing messages that respond to known customer safety concerns

2024*	Number of panelists
Below 200% FPL	94
Identifies as Black, indigenous, or person of color	73
Lives with a disability	69
Identifies as LGBTQ+	14
Student	24
Rides transit	152
Speaks a language other than English	12

**Panelists may identify with multiple groups*

LOCUS tool

- **Purpose:** Understand regional and sub-regional travel trends, mode splits, market share, and transit's competitiveness
- **Methods:** Integrated geo-location, ORCA, and APC data



Program evaluations and impact studies

- Partner with external researchers to design and implement rigorous evaluations:
 - Mentors Moving Metro program
 - Mobility supports for residents living in permanent supportive housing
 - Access on Demand
 - Community Transportation Navigators



Data products: State of the Customer dashboard

- Presents performance and customer data for core service elements together—helps promote clarity about how we are doing and surfaces learning opportunities

The screenshot shows a web dashboard with a dark sidebar on the left and a main content area on the right. The sidebar contains a navigation menu with categories like 'MTD Performance Metrics', 'Departmental Performance', 'ESJ Dashboard', 'Tier IV Board', 'Division-level Apps', and 'State of the Customer'. Under 'State of the Customer', there are sub-items: 'Overview: State of the C...', 'SOTC - Reliability', 'SOTC - Barriers', 'SOTC - Safety', and 'SOTC - Off-board experien...'. The main content area has a header with 'Welcome to the State of the Customer Dashboard + Learning Agenda!' and a sub-header 'Initial focus: Service Excellence'. Below this is a section for 'Interactive design'. At the bottom, there are four large, light-colored buttons labeled 'RELIABILITY', 'BARRIERS', 'SAFETY', and 'OFF-BOARD EXPERIENCE'.

File Share Comment Subscribe to dashboard

Some of the dashboard tiles didn't load. Show details

Welcome to the State of the Customer Dashboard + Learning Agenda!

Metro's goals and priorities encompass a commitment to ensuring **customers experience mobility as a human right** and **have positive experiences** when using our system so that they want to use transit more for more trips. To advance these goals, Metro teams and leaders have to be clear about what is true for customers and how our investments are contributing to customer experiences and outcomes.

To support Metro's work, the Research team has developed a *State of the Customer* product (SOTC) which provides:

- **A comprehensive picture of customer experience and what is changing.** SOTC draws on multiple data sources—performance data, Rider/Non-rider Survey, panel studies, LOCUS, C3, and others—to describe customers' experience in/around transit.
- **Opportunities to improve transit experiences.** Questions that emerge from the data and that can drive insights and decisions related to the continuous improvement of solutions, strategies, and investments: *What can or should Metro do to create the conditions for customers to experience excellence when they use transit?*

Initial focus: Service Excellence

Service Excellence expresses our General Manager's priority of creating conditions that result in consistently safe, clean, and reliable transit for Metro customers. MBRs and existing dashboards track a variety of measures related to safety, cleanliness, and reliability—such as the number of safety and security incidents across the system and on time performance. Those measures are important...AND, whether we are actually delivering safe, clean, and reliable transit is ALSO determined by what people *perceive*. Since customer experiences may not always match up neatly with performance metrics, advancing Service Excellence means uncovering and sitting with tensions around that and a commitment to improve.

Further, if Metro is to leverage positive perceptions that encourage transit use and mitigate negative perceptions that may dissuade people from using transit or degrade the experiences of those who depend on transit, we must pay attention to customer experiences alongside traditional performance measures.

Currently, SOTC covers **safety** and **reliability**—two key components of **Service Excellence**. The Research team will continue to build out SOTC, focusing on customers' experiences as well as customer outcomes related to ridership growth and mobility.

Interactive design

SOTC is designed to be interactive: clickable graphs and figures will take you to the relevant source data or report. We hope this makes it easy to investigate and examine data and evidence in targeted, thorough way!

RELIABILITY **BARRIERS** **SAFETY** **OFF-BOARD EXPERIENCE**

Data products: Research & learning profiles on key topics

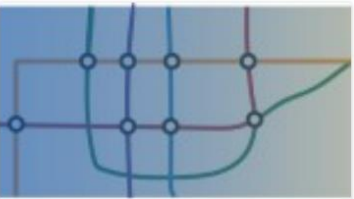
- **The REAL Hub**—comprehensive portal provides numerous resources and data links for Metro/King County employees
- **Research and learning profiles** summarize key findings, methods, and insights from research and data collection efforts
 - 35+ profiles help inform Metro’s decisions and actions



Research & Learning Profiles



Improving Metro’s Online Customer Comment Form



Transfers



Onboard Rider Survey



Safety Messaging



Travel Behaviors & Transit Experiences: East King County



Metro Flex User Interviews



RapidRide Kit of Parts Study



ORCA Features Customer Research

How does Metro data & research fit with a regional picture?

Aims of the Research Program

- Develop rigorous, relevant data and evidence so that Metro staff and leaders can make confident, informed decisions to advance agency goals and priorities
- Partner and share data where possible

Contact:

- King County Council:
stephanie.pure@kingcounty.gov
- Jurisdictions:
apleasant-brown@kingcounty.gov



Questions?