## STAFF REPORT

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| **Agenda Item:** | 8 | **Name:** | Paul Carlson Mary Bourguignon |
| **Proposed No**.: | 2018-0399 | **Date:** | September 5, 2018 |

**SUBJECT**

An ordinance approving King County Metro transit service changes for March 2019.

**SUMMARY**

Proposed Ordinance 2018-0399 would approve Metro bus route changes for March 2019. The changes would be focused on two areas:

* **Montlake.** One all-day and four peak-only bus routes between Seattle and Eastside communities would be revised to reflect the elimination of the Montlake Freeway Station due to Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) construction of the SR 520 project’s Montlake Phase.
* **Mercer Island.** On Mercer Island, Route 201 is proposed for elimination with the freed up service hours to be reinvested to add Saturday service to Route 204[[1]](#footnote-1).

Administrative changes to other routes, that would not require Council approval, are expected to take place in March 2019. These include removal of all Metro and Sound Transit buses from the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel due to the construction needs for East Link, and, depending on 2019-2020 budget decisions, potentially investments to address crowding and schedule reliability and City of Seattle purchases of bus service hours. It is not yet known which bus routes would receive crowding, schedule reliability, or City of Seattle service investments.

**BACKGROUND**

Service changes must be approved by ordinance if they modify a route’s service hours by more than 25 percent or if they move a stop more than one-half mile. The King County Department of Transportation (KCDOT) Director is authorized to approve route changes that have lesser impacts or to approve changes on an emergency basis.[[2]](#footnote-2) Elimination of a bus route and elimination of a bus stop without replacement are changes that require ordinance approval.

**Montlake Proposed Service Changes**

On SR 520, with the new floating bridge and the West Approach Bridge North completed, the remaining project elements from I-5 to a point just east of Foster Island are known collectively as “The Rest of the West.” The next element, the Montlake Phase, includes a new Montlake interchange, a landscaped lid over SR 520, a bicycle/pedestrian "land bridge" east of the lid, and a West Approach Bridge South for eastbound traffic. According to WSDOT’s SR 520 website: “This phase is currently in the contractor-procurement stage. We anticipate selecting a contractor by fall 2018 and launching construction later in the year.” Construction duration is through 2022-2023. The Portage Bay Phase and the plan for a second bascule bridge across the Montlake Cut are not part of the Montlake Phase.

Rest of the West Phases and construction period estimates are available at this link:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2015/04/16/SR520-map-RestOfTheWest-April2018.pdf>

Montlake Phase details are here:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2018/07/12/SR520-map-Montlake-Phase-Improvements-April2018.pdf>

WSDOT’s design/build Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Montlake Phase indicated to bidders that the Montlake Freeway Station would close in March 2019 so the staging for the first part of this phased approach could begin without presenting safety issues to the traveling public.

The Montlake Freeway Station consists of ramps leading off the westbound and eastbound SR 520 roadways, with bus shelters on both sides. Access to the eastbound stop is by a staircase from Montlake Boulevard; access to the westbound stop is by a sloping pedestrian walkway. Buses connecting the Seattle Central Business District (CBD) with the Eastside are able to stop in each direction, providing access to and from the Montlake neighborhood, bus stops on Montlake Boulevard and 23rd Avenue, and the University of Washington. Buses that operate along Montlake Boulevard, including buses that travel between the UW area and SR 520, do not use the Montlake Freeway Station.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Elimination of the Montlake Freeway Station would affect five Metro bus routes and two Sound Transit routes. Metro route 255 and Sound Transit Route 545 provide all-day service to the Montlake Freeway Station; Metro routes 252, 257, 268, and 311, and Sound Transit route 555 provide peak direction, peak period service to Montlake Freeway Station. All but one of these routes connect the northern Eastside (Kirkland/Redmond/Woodinville) with the Seattle CBD; the exception is Route 555, which connects Issaquah/Bellevue and Northgate.

Proposed Ordinance 2018-0399 would approve the deletion of the Montlake Freeway Station from the affected Metro Transit routes (252, 255, 257, 268, and 311) as a result of the WSDOT-required closure of that station. The County does not have jurisdiction over the Sound Transit routes. Table 1 provides ridership information for each affected route.

**Table 1. Montlake Freeway Station Ridership (average weekday boardings)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Montlake Freeway Station Ridership** | | | | **TOTAL RIDERSHIP** | | | |
| **Route** |  | **AM** | **PM** | **Off-peak** |  | **AM** | **PM** | **Off-peak** |
| **252** | To Seattle | 12 |  |  | To Seattle | 363 |  |  |
| To Eastside |  | 16 |  | To Eastside |  | 338 |  |
| **255** | To Seattle | 27 | 95 | 56 | To Seattle | 1556 | 695 | 1051 |
| To Eastside | 61 | 50 | 100 | To Eastside | 701 | 1590 | 1181 |
| **257** | To Seattle | 14 |  | 24 | To Seattle | 317 |  |  |
| To Eastside |  | 16 |  | To Eastside |  | 289 |  |
| **268** | To Seattle | 8 |  |  | To Seattle | 193 |  |  |
| To Eastside |  | 7 |  | To Eastside |  | 240 |  |
| **311** | To Seattle | 25 |  | 3 | To Seattle | 668 |  |  |
| To Eastside |  | 36 |  | To Eastside |  | 656 |  |

The Montlake Freeway Station provides cross-Lake travel options, particularly in the midday and evening weekdays and weekends, for riders traveling between the University District or UW campus and the Eastside. Riders can take the westbound 255 or 545 from Kirkland or Redmond, respectively, or catch the same routes eastbound.

Ridership on the five Metro routes is 9,838 per weekday, with 5.6 percent of boardings at the Montlake Freeway Station. Without the Montlake Freeway Station, options are more restricted. The Sound Transit Route 542 provides service connecting Redmond and the University District at 30-minute intervals on weekdays. During the evening and on weekends, travel between the northern Eastside and the University District will require transfers.

**Mercer Island Proposed Service Changes**

The proposed ordinance would discontinue Route 201, which currently operates two a.m. trips from south Mercer Island to Mercer Island Park and Ride, and one p.m. return trip. The Route 201 is currently a low-performing route, with daily ridership averaging nine passengers (three riders per trip).

An accompanying administrative change (not part of the proposed ordinance) would use the service hours created by the discontinuation of Route 201 to provide weekend service on Route 204. Route 204 currently operates 18 northbound weekday trips on Mercer Island and 17 southbound trips. Route 204 operates along Island Crest Way, through the center of the island, compared with Route 201, which follows West Mercer Way, along the western edge of the island.

Metro staff note that the change in service on Mercer Island would be implemented in coordination with a City of Mercer Island project to provide first mile/last mile solutions for transit riders, which could provide alternatives for current riders of Route 201.

**ANALYSIS**

Adoption of the proposed ordinance would approve Metro bus route changes in two areas:

**Montlake Freeway Station.** Metro Transit routes 252, 255, 257, 268, and 311 would be modified in response to the WSDOT-required closure of the Montlake Freeway Station. Although this closure affects connections between the University District and the Kirkland-Redmond-Woodinville area, especially during evenings and weekends, WSDOT has exercised its authority to close the Montlake Freeway Station.

**Mercer Island.** The proposed ordinance would also modify bus service on Mercer Island, discontinuing Route 201 and (through an administrative change) reinvesting the service hours in Route 204 to add weekend service. As noted above, Route 201 is a low performing bus route.[[4]](#footnote-4) Metro staff state that the City of Mercer Island supports the proposed change and that the public outreach conducted indicates support for weekend service on Route 204.

**Equity analysis.** Attachment B to Proposed Ordinance 2018-0399 is the Title VI Service Analysis. This analysis reviews the impact of proposed changes on low-income and minority communities. The Transit Division includes this analysis in the ordinance packet consistent with the 2013 update to the Transit Strategic Plan and Federal Transit Administration direction to heighten equity awareness.

The questions for this and any other major service change, are: (1) is there is a disparate impact on minority populations compared to non-minority populations, and (2) is there a disproportionate burden on low-income populations. Metro analysis for this proposed service change concludes that there is neither a disparate nor a disproportionate impact.

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Proposed Ordinance 2018-0399 (and its attachments)
2. Transmittal Letter (and its attachments)
3. Fiscal Note

**INVITED**

* Bill Bryant, Managing Director of Service Development, King County Metro Transit
* Katie Chalmers, Supervisor of Service Planning, King County Metro Transit

1. The Route 204 is also proposed to be converted to a Dial-A-Ride Transit (DART) route allowing for deviation from the route in some areas if requested by riders. The changes to Route 204 do not require approval by ordinance. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. K.C.C. 28.94.020.B provides: “B. Changes to regular routes shall be subject to approval by the council except as specifically provided in this section.

   1. The director is authorized to approve and implement the following changes of established routes and schedules and to update the "Public Transit Regular Routes" document accordingly:

    a. any single change or cumulative changes in a service schedule that affect the established weekly service hours for a route by twenty-five percent or less;

   b. any change in route location that does not move the location of any route stop by more than one half mile; and

    c. any changes in route numbers.

   2. In addition, if, in the opinion of the director, an emergency exists that requires any change to established routes, schedules or classes of service, the director may implement such a change for such a period as may be necessary in the director's judgment or until such a time as the council shall establish by ordinance otherwise. Such changes that the director intends to be permanent shall be reported in writing to the chair of the council. If an emergency exists as provided for in this subsection B.2, the director may waive or discount fares otherwise established in K.C.C. chapter 4A.700. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Route 271, the highest ridership route connecting Issaquah/Bellevue and the University District, does not use the Montlake Freeway Station. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)