## STAFF REPORT

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| **Agenda Item:** | 16 | **Name:** | Mary Bourguignon |
| **Proposed No**.: | 2021-B0033 | **Date:** | February 24, 2021 |

**SUBJECT**

Today’s briefing will review potential updates to the Service Guidelines, including a review of potential service growth (Priority 3) scenarios, potential changes related to reducing service, and potential language on flexible services.

**SUMMARY**

Metro uses three adopted policy documents to guide its actions:

* **The Strategic Plan for Public Transportation**[[1]](#footnote-1) outlines Metro’s goals, strategies, and performance measures.
* **The Service Guidelines**[[2]](#footnote-2) guide day-to-day delivery of transit service by helping Metro set targets for the level of transit service to be provided, evaluate performance, and add, reduce, or change service.
* **Metro Connects**[[3]](#footnote-3) is the adopted long-range plan, which outlines a goal of increasing bus service hours by 70 percent between 2015 and 2040.

Metro is working to update these policy documents, using a process outlined in the legislation that adopted the Metro Mobility Framework Recommendations Summary.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Today’s briefing will continue the committee’s discussions about Metro’s approach to the policy updates, focusing on a review of proposed changes and updates to the **Service Guidelines** focused on potential scenarios for service growth (Priority 3) for setting target service levels, the language around service reductions, and the language on flexible services.

**BACKGROUND**

The Service Guidelines, as currently adopted,[[5]](#footnote-5) summarize the criteria Metro uses to set target service levels along corridors to develop an all-day and peak-only network. They summarize how Metro evaluates and manages system performance using four priorities:[[6]](#footnote-6)

* Priority 1: Reduce Crowding
* Priority 2: Improve Reliability
* Priority 3: Service Growth
* Priority 4: Route Productivity

They also identify the criteria and processes Metro uses to plan for additions or reductions to transit service, acknowledge Metro’s partnerships with other jurisdictions and organizations, and include guidance on community engagement and outreach.

During previous briefings, Metro staff have shared their approach to Service Guidelines updates, focusing on:

* **Working with Partners.** Metro staff have outlined potential changes to clarify Metro’s relationships with partners, including differentiating between partnerships related to flexible service, fixed service, and infrastructure; and
* **Planning and Community Engagement.** Metro staff have discussed updating the Service Guidelines to require more rigorous, transparent, and inclusive forms of community engagement prior to service changes or restructures.

**Setting Target Service Levels.** In addition to these topics, Metro briefed the committee last month on the issue of setting target transit service levels. The currently adopted Service Guidelines use three factors (productivity, social equity, and geographic value) to measure the gap between currently offered service and the service that is needed. The Service Guidelines both weights and prioritizes these factors, with the three factors weighted as productivity (50 percent), social equity (25 percent), and geographic value (25 percent); and with investment order prioritized based on the scores for geographic value, productivity, and equity in that order.

Metro staff have proposed to update this process of setting target service levels by:

* Broadening the definition of equity from race and income to include race, income, disability, foreign-born, and limited English speaker;
* Adding consideration of low- and medium-income job locations to the productivity score;
* Adding target service levels for weekend service to cost estimates;
* Using population data (how many people live in an area) rather than boarding data (how many people ride a route);
* Adding Metro Connects corridors, using Metro Connects proposed service levels as a service minimum, and using the Service Guidelines to establish service levels appropriate above and beyond Metro Connects; and
* Changing the prioritization of the three factors, noting that:
  + - Prioritizing geographic value would result in investment targets similar to the existing Service Guidelines;
    - Prioritizing equity would result in service investments for populations without existing transit access and would reflect pandemic ridership patterns; and
    - Prioritizing productivity would follow existing service and land use and would have the greatest impact on climate change measures.

Today’s briefing will provide a recap of this discussion of potential changes to setting target service levels, focused around the prioritization of the geographic value, equity, and productivity factors.

**Service Reductions.** Today’s briefing will also focus on language in the Service Guidelines around service reductions.

The Service Guidelines, as currently adopted,[[7]](#footnote-7) summarize the criteria Metro uses to set target service levels along corridors to develop an all-day and peak-only network, as well as how Metro evaluates, adds, and reduces service.

Adding service is determined by using four guidelines:

1. Passenger loads
2. Schedule reliability
3. All-day and peak-only network (service growth)
4. Route productivity

In addition, when prioritizing investments in the transit network, Metro considers local and regional planning efforts, including Metro Connects; changes to the transportation network; operational considerations; productivity, geographic value, and social equity impacts; service quality needs; and corridor scores (from the Priority 3 service growth analysis).

When Metro must reduce service, the same general guidelines are used in the following order. Within the guidelines, Metro ensures that social equity is a primary consideration in any reduction proposal and complies with all state and federal regulations.

* **Category 1: Low-productivity routes.** Reduce service on routes that are below the 25 percent productivity threshold for a given time period. Metro considers these types of reductions in a way that prioritizes maintaining the overall network and the operation of individual corridors. Specifically:
  + Low productivity routes that duplicate or overlap with other routes on corridors on the all-day and peak-only network would be higher priorities for reduction, followed by
  + Peak-only routes that do not have a travel time or ridership advantage, and then
  + All-day routes that operate on corridors that are above their target service levels, with the final category for reductions in this area being
  + All-day routes that operate on corridors that are at their target service levels.
* **Category 2: Restructure.** Reductions can occur through restructures that improve the efficiency of service.
* **Category 3: Moderate-productivity routes.** Next, service would be reduced on routes that are above the 25 percent productivity threshold for a given time period. Routes that are between the 25 and 50 percent threshold are considered before routes that are above the 50 percent productivity threshold in a way that prioritizes maintaining the overall network and the operation of individual corridors. Specifically:
  + Moderate-productivity routes that duplicate or overlap with other routes on corridors on the all-day and peak-only network would be higher priorities for reduction, followed by
  + Any other peak-only route that was not considered as part of the first category for reductions, and then
  + All-day routes that operate on corridors that are above their target service levels, with the final category for reductions in this area being
  + All-day routes that operate on corridors that are at their target service levels.
* **Category 4: Below-target corridors.** The final category to consider is to reduce service on routes that are below the 25 percent productivity threshold for a given time period on corridors that have been identified as being below their target service levels. In this case, lowest productivity routes would be considered first.

In addition to these guidelines, the Service Guidelines identify a number of other factors to be considered when Metro must reduce service, including:

* The relative impacts to all areas of the county, to minimize or mitigate significant impacts in any one area.
* Ways to minimize impacts through the type of reduction, particularly through restructuring service.
* Attempting to maintain the target level of service on corridors in the All-Day and Peak-Only Network and avoiding reducing service on corridors that are already below their target service levels.
* Preserving last connections to avoid leaving areas of the county, particularly unincorporated rural areas, without any connection to frequent transit service.
* Providing alternative or flexible service as a potentially cost-effective way to reduce or replace fixed route service.

During today’s briefing, Metro staff will discuss potential language changes related to service reductions to center Mobility Framework guidance around equity and sustainability. Specifically, Metro proposes to focus reduction priorities to:

* Base prioritization for all-day routes on productivity;
* Within each prioritization, identify candidate routes as high- or low-equity,[[8]](#footnote-8) with low-equity routes receiving first consideration of reduction within each priority; and
* Add a sustainability threshold to consider as highest priority any reductions where service is emitting more greenhouse gas than single occupancy vehicles.

Metro staff will also discuss additional reductions factors including ways to ensure that no one area experiences significant negative impacts beyond what other areas experience; ways to minimize impacts through the type of reduction, particularly through restructuring; preservation of last connections, including in east and south King County adjacent to or surrounded by rural land; and applicability of flexible services in minimizing impacts to communities.

Metro staff note that route performance (productivity) would remain the primary quantitative input to reductions planning, and that consideration of additional factors – including balancing reductions across the county, minimizing impacts through restructuring, and preserving last connections – would remain critical.

**Flexible Services.** The Service Guidelines currently contain information on planning alternative (now called flexible) services.[[9]](#footnote-9) This section in the current Service Guidelines includes information about services including VanShare, Vanpool, Rideshare Matching, Dial-A-Ride Transit (DART), Community Access Transit (CAT), Community Shuttle, Community Van, Real-Time Rideshare, and Trip Pool.

Potential updates to this section would reflect the evolution of flexible and alternative services, provide transparent priorities for future investment, ensure flexible services’ performance is measured consistently across projects, and provide clear guidance on pilots and pilot projects. Specifically, Metro staff will discuss plans to:

* Create prioritization methodology for investment areas for future flexible services;
* Add metrics for existing flexible services on productivity, efficiency, and equity;
* Outline types of measures for future flexible services on productivity, efficiency, and equity; and
* Provide a framework for evaluating flexible services during pilot periods and whether a service should be continued, discontinued, or transitioned to permanent service.

Metro staff will discuss proposed evaluation metrics to measure both permanent and pilot services on:

* **Productivity,** to ensure that service utilization is measured in a way to allows for total service usage and growth in service usage to be compared to similar Metro services;
* **Efficiency,** to measure service cost in a manner consistent with similar existing services to allow for cross-service comparison; and
* **Equity,** so that locational choices prioritize service for priority populations.

Metro staff propose to add flexible services as pilot programs to allow Metro to learn more about how the service operates, how a community uses the service, provides for continuous improvement, and allows for evaluation before a pilot program is either made permanent or discontinued.

**Next Steps.** Metro will continue to share potential changes and updates to its adopted policy documents through the first five months of the year. Metro anticipates that proposed updates to the policy documents will be transmitted for review by the RTC and County Council in late July.

**INVITED**

* Katie Chalmers, Supervisor, Transit Planning, Metro Transit Department

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Metro presentation: Service Guidelines Update, February 24, 2021

1. Ordinance 18301 Attachment A [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ordinance 18301 Attachment B [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ordinance 18449 Attachment A [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Mobility Framework was requested by Motion 15253. The Mobility Framework Recommendations Summary and policy update process were adopted by Motion 15618. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ordinance 18301, Attachment B [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. These measures are incorporated into an annual System Evaluation Report. Ordinance 17597 requires Metro to transmit a System Evaluation Report by October 31 of each year (this year, because of the pandemic, the report will not be transmitted until December). The System Evaluation Report must be reviewed by the RTC and Council and accepted by motion. The 2019 System Evaluation Report was accepted through Motion 15602. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ordinance 18301, Attachment B [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Metro notes that equity would be measured using the five-point Opportunity Index Score. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ordinance 18301, Attachment B, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)