

Rethinking Transit & Mobility

A summary of research, workshops & survey outcomes

As public transportation emerges from the pandemic and enters a new normal, WSDOT's Secretary Roger Millar wants to better serve the people of Washington. In October 2020, WSDOT worked with a diverse group of transportation partners to think ahead about **how transit and mobility will evolve in the post-pandemic environment**. Spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent public health crisis, the purpose of the engagement was to create a shared vision for the future of transit and mobility across the state.

People participated in a series of virtual workshops focused on rethinking the way our transportation system serves the state and its residents. Based on the workshop outcomes, a subsequent survey was sent out asking participants to prioritize specific objectives for WSDOT to pursue.

The outcomes below resulted from:

- 7 workshops with over 70 participants,
- A survey with 25 participants,
- Representatives from transit agencies, local and county governments, regional/metropolitan/tribal planning organizations, human services providers,
- Over 46 different ranked and prioritized recommendations.¹

Key themes

WSDOT's transportation partners identified several themes through the course of the workshops. The most common themes are listed below:

- Increase organizational and regulatory flexibility
- Improve information sharing & collaboration between providers
- Renew focus on developing sustainable practices
- Invest in infrastructure to support transit and mobility
- Prioritize human services and equity
- Expand public transportation service
- Deploy technology and mobility tools to promote access to services

Top recommendations

In the workshops, stakeholders identified recommendations to respond to various scenarios. These responses were aggregated into 46 possible recommendations, which were then ranked by survey participants as most important and least important. The recommendations below were scored as most important by WSDOT partners who took the survey:

1. Establish a **baseline for minimum service** and provide funding to ensure this level of service across the state.

¹ See [Appendix A](#) for a full list of recommendations.

2. Apply **demographic equity criteria** to funding sources to prioritize projects that serve vulnerable and underserved populations.
3. Ensure **people with special needs can access goods, services, and jobs**.
4. Develop **new revenue models for funding public transportation**.
5. Develop policies and funding sources to support **all day transit**.

Transit safety during COVID-19

As the rethinking transit & mobility initiative had an explicit focus on a post-pandemic future, the issue of current transit COVID-19-related safety measures was not addressed. As a companion to this work, WSDOT data analysts conducted a literature review on current best practices, including a comparison on how other states and countries have addressed the pandemic on their public transportation systems. The results of this research can be found in [Appendix C](#).

Workshop Methodology

WSDOT staff reviewed all workshop results and placed all comments into a spreadsheet for analysis. Workshop results informed the recommendations placed into the follow-up survey.

Survey respondents were given randomized sets of three recommendation actions. For each set, participants were asked to rank the most important and least important actions. The final scores and ranking for each recommendation were calculated by taking the percent of respondents that indicated a recommendation was most important and subtracting the percent of respondents that indicated it was the least important in the set. These results are aggregated in this report.

Next steps

The audience for this report is WSDOT's Secretary, Roger Millar. The Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Executive Board (an advisory board chaired by Secretary Roger Millar) will review these results and provide feedback.

WSDOT will use these results to inform the agency's work and the development of the Statewide Public Transportation Plan in 2021.

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Appendix A: Survey results

Rethinking Transit and Mobility

Workshop recommendation survey results

Rank	Recommendation	Score
1	Establish baseline for minimum service and provide funding to ensure this level of service across the state.	0.6
2	Apply demographic equity criteria to funding sources to prioritize projects that serve vulnerable and underserved populations.	0.48
3	Ensure people with special needs can access goods, services and jobs.	0.48
4	Develop new revenue models for funding public transportation (e.g., road use fees).	0.46
5	Develop policies and funding sources to support all day transit.	0.33
6	Prioritize right-of-way for transit / Dedicate lanes for transit.	0.3
7	Fund and support electric and alternative fuel fleets in public transportation.	0.28
8	Expand pedestrian networks in suburban and rural areas.	0.24
9	Increase flexibility for how grant applicants can use state funding sources.	0.23
10	Redefine public transit (as codified in state regulations) to be more comprehensive, include teleworking and food delivery services.	0.21
11	Support early adopters and pilot programs in technology, including mobility tools like real-time information systems and ride sharing platforms.	0.19
12	Improve transit stops for extreme weather conditions (shelters/lighting/seating).	0.15
13	Support data standards and data sharing across WA.	0.15
14	Ensure equity when building new technology and mobility services.	0.12
15	Support and fund transit operator training and licensing to ensure adequate supply.	0.12
16	Support Universal Broadband and expanded fiber networks.	0.12
17	Build rural mobility hubs.	0.12
18	Fund a pilot-project that involves payment integration, and one-call, one-click scheduling software that would allow a public transit provider to schedule an Uber/Lyft/etc. ride for their client and electronically take care of the fare.	0.08
19	Lead coordination efforts to improve human services programs across different counties and cities.	0.04
20	Prioritize winter road maintenance and snow removal in cold weather areas.	0.04
21	Apply geographic equity criteria to funding sources so that funds are equitably distributed across Washington state in rural, small urban, and urban areas.	0.04
22	Provide land that WSDOT owns for other purposes that maximize its community benefit.	0.04
23	Lower the cost for scheduling technology for paratransit services to include better real-time information and scheduling.	0.04
24	Improve real-time information systems (511) and communications between service providers and customers.	0

25	Increase flexibility in rules about fleet size, vehicle sizes, use, and replacement.	0
26	Increase flexibility in commute trip reduction (CTR) policies and programs.	0
27	Increase flexibility in vanpool policies and programs	-0.04
28	Support long term adoption of new cleaning procedures launched during COVID crisis (air circulation, Hydrogen peroxide, UV light, etc.).	-0.08
29	Implement one-call one-click and/or transit mapping, for the entire state.	-0.11
30	Invest in better chargers so electric vehicles can go longer distances.	-0.12
31	Increase flexibility in how WSDOT uses facilities and properties.	-0.12
32	Fund pilot projects for on-demand and microtransit (IT-enabled private multi-passenger transportation services, such as Bridj, Chariot, Split, and Via) services.	-0.12
33	Support, and facilitate where possible, mobility as a service through public private partnerships	-0.12
34	Increase research and funding into fare reduction and zero fare programs.	-0.14
35	Enable transit pass users to have access to E-bike/scooter services through the same pass.	-0.19
36	Invest in and deploy real time signage.	-0.19
37	Support statewide mobility management and travel training programs.	-0.19
38	Allow public transit to provide community support activities such as transporting food boxes.	-0.19
39	Provide engagement materials and customer information in multiple languages.	-0.24
40	Support Wi-Fi on buses.	-0.31
41	Monitor growth management as people move to rural areas.	-0.31
42	Increase technology investments for spot availability as curb space utilization changes to accommodate delivery, active transportation, and other options besides parking.	-0.32
43	Build grant writing expertise within WSDOT to support partners and projects.	-0.5
44	Provide weather advisory alert systems (via emergency management system).	-0.5
45	Increase training by adding training resources to the state library and adding a training track for land use and transportation planning at WSDOT.	-0.52
46	Focus on trail improvements as roads degrade.	-0.56

Appendix B: Workshop instructions

Rethinking Transit and Mobility – Discussion Guide

General instructions:

Your task is to work together to provide (1) a description of transit and mobility in the future and (2) recommendations on what statewide actions we should take.

You and your partner or team members will facilitate your own discussion.

Choose someone to take notes. That person can share their screen to facilitate collaboration.

As you are working, **assume it is the year 2023** and any solutions you come up with are implementable within the next five years (2023-2028).

Make sure your descriptions and recommendations are:

- Clear, direct, in writing, and as specific as possible.
- Right-sized and financially realistic.
- Applicable statewide.
- Considered reasonable by everyone in your group.
- Inclusive of different modes of transportation and types of public transit.

Send your final description and recommendations to Jacob.brett@wsdot.wa.gov. And if you have any questions during your discussion, please text Jacob at (360) 701-3729.

Step 1: Develop a description of transit and mobility in your assigned future:

The scenarios are listed below. Check the name of your breakout room to confirm the scenario you have been assigned. Create a brief narrative to describe the transportation conditions in that scenario. Your narrative can be in any format you choose – bullet points, paragraph form, images – it just needs to be communicated in an easy-to-understand manner.

Resiliency

Conditions:

- Meteorological weather patterns in Washington are predictable and governments are able to adapt and change.
- Governments are unable to keep up with advances in transportation technology.

Preparedness

Conditions:

- Meteorological shifts in Washington's weather patterns are predictable and governments are able to adapt and prepare for changes.
- Governments are able to keep up with advances in transportation technology.

Resourcefulness

Conditions:

- Meteorological shifts in Washington's weather patterns are unpredictable and governments are unable to adapt and prepare for changes.

- Governments are able to keep up with advances in transportation technology.

Reaction

Conditions:

- Meteorological shifts in Washington's weather patterns are unpredictable and governments are unable to adapt and prepare for changes.
- Governments are unable to keep up with advances in transportation technology.

Step 2: Develop statewide recommendations

Recommendations

Provide recommendations for WSDOT and the state, drawing on your experiences. The question you are answering is "What should the state do to ensure that transit and mobility improve in this scenario?"

Prompt List

You are welcome to use the following prompts to help you as you think about your scenario and recommendations, but please do not feel limited to only these prompts, or compelled to respond to every prompt:

- A. Commuter behavior and preferred transportation modes
- B. Telework, tele-education, and tele-services
- C. Roadway allocation (right-of-way)
- D. Human services transportation (essential trips, essential riders)
- E. On-demand transit, micro-transit, and new delivery systems (i.e. bringing goods to people)
- F. Transit service and ridership (peak demand issues, types of services: ferries, fixed route, rail, demand response, vanpool, etc.)
- G. WSDOT funding, grants, etc.
- H. Pilot programs
- I. Where do people want to live / push – pull factors (urban, suburban, rural)?

Appendix C: Safety on public transit during COVID

WSDOT Public Transportation Division data analysts conducted a literature review of existing public transportation COVID-19 related research in November 2020. The findings are summarized below.

Is transit safe?

Riding transit during COVID appears to be safe. Contact tracing in Europe and Japan cannot link transit use to spread of the virus.²

The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) published a guidebook on transit safety and COVID in September of 2020.³ The APTA report reaffirms that there is no link between transit use and transmission rates. The report goes on to clearly spell out how transmission occurs and the ways to reduce spread including wearing masks, being physically distant, washing hands, sanitizing surfaces, and limiting duration of potential risk.

A similar report by the International Union for Public Transport describes research and findings from the University of Colorado, France, Germany, and the World Health Organization and concludes that given proper mask and cleaning measures, transit is safe.⁴ The general consensus of these groups is that being indoors, but in a well ventilated, socially distant place, while wearing a mask for a short duration poses a low risk similar to being outdoors.

How is COVID-19 affecting Washington transit providers?

- Washington State established restrictions on bus capacity and requires riders to wear masks, but many transit providers are taking additional measures.
- King County Metro is adding mask dispensers on the most popular routes.⁵ In addition, many transit providers (e.g. King County Metro) installed safety partitions to protect operators, closed off some seats to enhance the distance between passengers, instituted new cleaning policies to disinfect all vehicles daily, and added vehicles to the busiest routes.⁶
- Sound Transit adopted similar measures, and reports spot cleaning throughout the day at stations.⁷ Across the central Puget Sound, similar restrictions and conditions are in place at Community Transit, Kitsap Transit, Pierce Transit, and the Seattle Streetcar.
- Along with the state-wide mask mandate, all agencies surveyed included some type of daily vehicle sanitation, but these practices may differ in approach.

² How safe is public transportation? Retrieved from <https://medical.mit.edu/covid-19-updates/2020/09/how-safe-public-transportation>.

³ Public Transit and COVID-19 Pandemic: Global Research and Best Practices. Retrieved from <https://www.apta.com/research-technical-resources/research-reports/public-transit-and-covid-19-pandemic-global-research-and-best-practices/>. Direct file: https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA_Covid_Best_Practices_09.29.2020.pdf

⁴ Public Transport is COVID-Safe. Retrieved from <https://cms.uitp.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Policy-Brief-PTisCOVID-Safe.pdf>

⁵ What Does Safe Public Transit Look Like During COVID-19? Retrieved from <https://www.governing.com/community/What-Does-Safe-Public-Transit-Look-Like-During-COVID-19.html>

⁶ How Metro is Keeping You Safe. Retrieved from <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/transportation/metro/schedules-maps/healthier-metro.aspx#keeping-you-safe>.

⁷ Staying Safe on Board Trains and Buses. Retrieved from <https://www.soundtransit.org/blog/platform/staying-safe-board-trains-buses>.

- To reduce the risk of transmission between operators and riders, many agencies suspended fare collections or introduced rear-door boarding. In most cases, these policies were time-limited – providers in Washington gradually reintroduced fares in tandem with additional safety measures, such as the installation of plexiglass barriers.

What are other countries doing?

- Luxembourg is leading Europe in removing transit fares all together.⁸
- Other nations are generally doing more to protect riders than the US since our federal administration blocked the CDC from issuing requirements for wearing masks on transit.⁹
- Locations that institute protections, as is the case in Washington State, are mirroring the best practices established by other transit agencies across the world.

What are best practices during COVID?

Guidelines for riding transit during COVID are the same as for other activities: **wear a mask, maintain social distance, and wash hands.**

In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and prevention suggests that a rider should **avoid touching surfaces** and **consider traveling during off-peak periods** to reduce the risk of exposure.¹⁰ The APTA guidebook lays out specific details for these measures with respect to transit. Transit agencies could limit the number of riders in a vehicle, encourage riders to travel off-peak hours, and establish safety rules for slowly ramping services back up.¹¹

⁸ Mass Problems for Mass Transit. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/global-translations/2020/10/30/mass-problems-for-mass-transit-490760>.

⁹ White House Blocked C.D.C. From Mandating Masks on Public Transit. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2020/10/09/world/covid-coronavirus>

¹⁰ Protect Yourself When Using Transportation. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/using-transportation.html>

¹¹ Restoring public transit amid COVID-19: What European cities can learn from one another. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/travel-logistics-and-transport-infrastructure/our-insights/restoring-public-transit-amid-covid-19-what-european-cities-can-learn-from-one-another>