

Rethinking Transit & Mobility

Adapting to the COVID crisis while responding to the climate crisis

Spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent public health and financial crises, WSDOT convened a diverse group of transportation partners to create a shared vision for **how transit and mobility will evolve in the post-pandemic environment**.

WSDOT led a series of workshops to assess how the state should respond to the combined effects of the pandemic, climate change and emerging technology. Participants included:

- Transit agencies
- Washington State Transit Association
- Local and county governments
- Transportation demand management professionals
- Regional/metropolitan/tribal transportation planning organizations
- Human services providers
- WSDOT staff

As public transportation emerges from the pandemic and enters a new normal, WSDOT will continue to partner with the state's transit agencies and other transportation providers to better serve the people of Washington.

Key themes

Several themes emerged from the workshops that will help develop a shared vision as the state navigates the post-pandemic future. The most common themes are listed below:

- **Increase organizational and regulatory flexibility** – More flexibility in public transit rules and regulations will help providers be more resilient in the face of a crisis.
- **Improve information sharing and collaboration between providers** – Better coordination among providers will support a more efficient transportation system.
- **Renew focus on developing sustainable practices** – Sustainable programs and policies will enable transportation providers to support the environment and address the underlying causes of climate change.
- **Invest in infrastructure to support transit and mobility** – Transit-friendly infrastructure helps ensure that transit providers can offer fast and reliable services for riders.
- **Prioritize human services and equity** – People with special transportation needs and traditionally underserved communities are in dire need of improved mobility options, many of which are severely constrained during the current pandemic.
- **Expand public transportation service** – Public transportation service is currently limited in terms of speed, frequency, location and timing. Expanding this service will ensure that people have access to jobs, healthcare, education, goods and services.

- **Deploy technology and mobility tools to promote access to services** – Supporting various new mobility technologies and platforms will make transportation options easier to find and use in all parts of the state.

Top recommendations

Workshop participants also identified and ranked specific recommendations for how WSDOT and the state can advance each key theme. The list below includes the top five recommendations from stakeholders (see [Appendix A](#) for a full list of recommendations):

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

These recommendations are more actionable than the key themes and would create a major shift in thinking about public transportation. Further engagement in 2021 during WSDOT's update of the Washington State Public Transportation Plan will determine the viability of these recommendations, identify key roles and assess multiple implementation strategies.

Transit safety during COVID-19

Because the Rethinking Transit & Mobility initiative focuses on a post-pandemic future, WSDOT and its partners did not address current transit safety measures related to COVID-19 during the workshops.

However, WSDOT data analysts conducted a literature review on current best practices for transit safety, including a comparison of how other states and countries have addressed transit safety during the pandemic. The results of this research are in [Appendix C](#).

Next steps

The Transportation Demand Management Executive Board, an advisory board chaired by WSDOT's Secretary Roger Millar, will review the recommendations and provide feedback to WSDOT.

While some of the recommendations may apply directly to research, programs and grants at WSDOT, other recommendations regarding policy, funding, infrastructure and land-use changes will require additional collaboration with other state entities and agencies.

WSDOT will also use the recommendations to inform the agency's update of the Washington State Public Transportation Plan in 2021, which will include additional engagement. These recommendations will serve as a starting point for conversations with transportation partners.

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, including 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 (e.g., shelters, lighting and seating).	0.15
13	Support data standards and data sharing across Washington.	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 (e.g., 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 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-19 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 micro-transit services (e.g., IT-enabled private multi-passenger transportation services such as Bridj, Chariot, Split and Via).	-0.12
33	Support and facilitate, where possible, mobility as a service through public-private partnerships.	-0.12
34	Increase research and funding for 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 WiFi 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

Workshop Methodology

Participants engaged 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 to participants to prioritize specific objectives for WSDOT to pursue.

The outcomes resulted from:

- Seven workshops with over 70 participants.
- A survey with 25 participants.
- Representatives from transit agencies, local and county governments, regional/metropolitan/tribal planning organizations, and human services providers.
- Over 46 different ranked and prioritized recommendations (see [Appendix A](#) for a full list of recommendations).

WSDOT staff reviewed all workshop results and documented all comments on a spreadsheet for analysis. Workshop results informed the recommendations included in the follow-up survey.

WSDOT gave survey respondents randomized sets of three recommendation actions. For each set, WSDOT asked respondents to rank the most important and least important actions. WSDOT calculated the final scores and ranking for each recommendation by taking the percent of respondents who indicated a recommendation was most important and subtracting the percent of respondents who indicated it was the least important in the set. WSDOT aggregated the results for this report.

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 data analysts from the Public Transportation Division conducted a literature review of COVID-19 related research in transportation. The findings are below.

Is transit safe?

Riding transit during the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be safe. Contact tracing in Europe and Japan cannot link transit use to spread of the virus.¹

The American Public Transportation Association published a guidebook on transit safety and COVID-19 in September 2020.² The association's 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, using physical distancing, washing hands, sanitizing surfaces, and limiting the duration of potential risks.

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. The report concludes that, given proper mask and cleaning measures, transit is safe.³ The group's general consensus was that being indoors in a well-ventilated, socially distanced place while wearing a mask for a short duration poses a low risk that is similar to being outdoors.

How are Washington transit providers addressing COVID-19?

The Governor's office established restrictions on bus capacity and requires riders to wear masks, but many transit providers are taking additional measures.⁴ Examples follow:

- King County Metro is adding mask dispensers on the most popular routes.⁵ In addition, many transit providers (e.g., King County Metro and Jefferson Transit) 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, 7}
- Sound Transit adopted similar measures as well as spot cleans throughout the day at stations.⁸ Across the central Puget Sound, similar restrictions and conditions are in place at Community Transit, Kitsap Transit, Pierce Transit and Seattle Streetcar.

¹ How safe is public transportation? Retrieved from <https://medical.mit.edu/covid-19-updates/2020/09/how-safe-public-transportation>.

² 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

³ Public Transport is COVID-Safe. Retrieved from <https://cms.uitp.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Policy-Brief-PTisCOVID-Safe.pdf>

⁴ Insee issues COVID-19 public transportation safety guidance. Retrieved from <https://www.governor.wa.gov/news-media/insee-issues-covid-19-public-transportation-safety-guidance>

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 Jefferson Transit, COVID-19 Monitoring- Limiting the Spread of Coronavirus. Retrieved from <https://jeffersontransit.com/covid19response/>

⁸ Staying Safe on Board Trains and Buses. Retrieved from <https://www.soundtransit.org/blog/platform/staying-safe-board-trains-buses>.

- Along with the statewide mask mandate, all agencies surveyed included some type of daily vehicle sanitation, but these practices may differ in approach.
- To reduce the risk of transmission between operators and riders, many agencies suspended fare collection or introduced rear-door boarding. In most cases, these policies were time limited. Some 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.⁹
- Other nations are generally doing more to protect riders than the U.S. because the federal administration blocked the Centers for Disease Control from issuing requirements for wearing masks on transit.¹⁰
- Locations that institute protections, such as Washington state, are mirroring the best practices established by other transit agencies across the world.

What are best practices for riders during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Best practices for riding transit during the COVID-19 pandemic 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.¹¹ The American Public Transportation Association 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.¹²

⁹ Mass Problems for Mass Transit. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/global-translations/2020/10/30/mass-problems-for-mass-transit-490760>.

¹⁰ 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>

¹¹ Protect Yourself When Using Transportation. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/using-transportation.html>

¹² 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>