Rates of Fare for the Transit Program: 2023 Report

September 25, 2024

King County

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II. Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the modified rates of fare and special transportation services programs offered in 2023 in compliance with section 28.94.265 of the code. Highlights from the report include:

- Enrollment in the Access paratransit program increased by 10 percent and boardings increased by 12 percent in 2023.
- Free transit promotions for outreach, marketing and promotional purposes resulted in foregone fare revenue estimated at $646,467 of an allowable $700,000. Typically, the annual allowable loss in fare revenue for all such programs is limited to $350,000, however this amount was temporarily increased in 2023 to allow Metro to provide systemwide fare-free transit for the Major League Baseball All-Star Game.
- Human Service Bus Ticket sales increased by 14 percent in 2023. This represents a total fare value of $2,078,270 with a cost to social service agencies of $207,827.

Over the next year, Metro will work internally and with regional partners to align fare policies, modernize the ORCA system, and improve affordability for those with the greatest need while ensuring fare revenue targets are met. Key efforts include the development of a cashless transition plan to identify a timeline and strategies for eliminating cash payment onboard buses, as well as the Reduced Fares Simplification project, which is a regional effort started in 2024 by Metro to evaluate and overhaul the ORCA reduced fare programs for low-income, senior, and disabled riders.

In 2025, Metro will continue to work in partnership with the other ORCA agencies to begin implementing the strategies and recommendations coming out of the reduced fares work with the goals of improving the accessibility and utility of reduced fare programs for riders and easing the administrative burden for agencies.

III. Background

Department Overview: King County Metro is the Puget Sound region's largest public transportation agency. Metro provides bus, paratransit, vanpool, and water taxi services, and operates Seattle Streetcar, Sound Transit Link light rail, and Sound Transit Express bus service. Metro is committed to providing safe, equitable, and sustainable mobility, and prioritizing service where needs are greatest.

Historical Context: KCC 28.94.265 requires that the director of the King County Metro Transit Department (King County Metro) shall submit annually to the council, by September 30, a report on the services and fares authorized by K.C.C. 28.94.035, 28.94.045, 28.94.225, 4A.700.530, 4A.700.350, 4A.700.610, and 4A.700.210. The report shall be filed with the clerk of the council, who shall retain an electronic copy and provide an electronic copy to all councilmembers. (Ord. 19738 § 16, 2023: Ord. 18837 § 2, 2018: Ord. 18635 § 35, 2017: Ord. 17130 § 10, 2011: Ord. 16702 § 5, 2009: Ord. 12643 § 23, 1997).

Metro has a variety of special fares and fares for services other than regularly scheduled transportation services to meet the growing need for transportation services and facilities throughout the county. These programs enable Metro to promote transit services, provide specialized passes and services, and attract new ridership. By promoting transit ridership, the activities reported here support the goals of King County's Strategic Climate Action Plan[1] to make more efficient use of our roadways. In addition, Transit's Access, Community Access Transportation, and Human Services Ticket programs help promote access to transportation, which is a determinant of equity in King County and is consistent with equity and social justice goals.[2]

Current Context: Fares represent an important source of revenue for Metro and are a key component to riders' experience of and access to the public transit system. Metro's fare-related programs increase access to transit for those not served by regular rates of fare, in line with the King County Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan[3] objective of ensuring that investments in the transportation system are made "in the places and people with greatest needs." The summary of those activities in this report also promotes fiscal responsibility in line with Metro's Strategic Plan for Public Transportation's[4] objective to "exercise sound financial management and ensure Metro's long-term financial sustainability."

Report Methodology: The report is prepared annually by Metro's Fare Policy Team, with data and contributions provided by subject matter experts from each section's respective programs and teams.

[1] https://your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/climate/documents/scap-2020-approved/2020-king-county-strategic-climate-action-plan.pdf
[2] https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/executive/governance-leadership/equity-social-justice/office-of-equity-race-social-justice/determinants-of-equity
[3] https://aqua.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/library/dnrp-directors-office/equity-social-justice/201609-ESJ-SP-FULL.pdf
[4] https://kingcounty.gov/~/media/depts/metro/about/planning/pdf/2021-31/2021/metro-strategic-plan-111721.pdf

IV. Report Requirements

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the modified rates of fare and special transportation services programs offered in 2023 in compliance with section 28.94.265 of the code. Each section begins with the relevant title of the King County Code section and follows with a program summary.

A. ADA Paratransit & Community Transportation Programs

KCC 28.94.035 ADA paratransit program

KCC 28.94.045 King County Metro community transportation program and services

Program Summary
King County Metro's Access Transportation program (Access) provides origin-to-destination paratransit service in King County for people who cannot otherwise get to or ride regular Metro bus or Sound Transit Link light rail service due to a disability. Eligibility is based on whether a person's disability prevents them from performing the tasks needed to ride regular public bus service some or all the time. Customers must reserve a trip one day ahead of time and specify the pick-up and drop-off locations. In 2024, Metro began piloting a new service for Access customers called Metro Flex Access On-Demand which allows users to book and take trips on the same day.

The Community Access Transportation (CAT) program provides vans and operating grants to agencies that provide special needs transportation to seniors and people with disabilities in King County.

The Taxi Scrip program is an agreement with taxi companies to provide rides to low-income King County residents that have a disability or are over the age of 64. Program participants make trips on eligible taxi companies and pay the driver using the scrip in place of cash for the metered trip. Participants purchase the vouchers at roughly 50 percent of their value from the Metro.

Below is a summary of the 2023 program data compared to the previous year.

- The ADA paratransit program had 12,376 total ADA Registered Clients as of December 2023, compared to 11,229 in December 2022, an increase of 10 percent.

- 2023 ADA registrant boardings with Access Transportation increased by 12 percent to 748,380.

- The Taxi Scrip program had 12,781 eligible registrants in 2023, 2 percent higher than in 2022. Participants took 2,108 taxi scrip trips in 2023, a 9 percent decrease.

- Community Access Transportation (CAT) agencies provided 246,404 rides to persons participating in their programs in 2023, a 9 percent increase.

- Service costs for all paratransit programs in 2023 were $74,118,959, an 11 percent increase from $67,062,544 in 2022. The Access Transportation program represented 92% of service costs compared to 8% for CAT. Service costs include direct operating, program management, ADA eligibility and registration, and administrative expenses.

- Total Paratransit fare revenue was $769,281 in 2023, with 62 percent from cash fares and 38 percent from ORCA pass revenue.

B. Ride Free Services Agreements

KCC 28.94.225 Ride free services agreements

Program Summary
This section authorizes the County Executive to enter into agreements to provide ride free services within geographic areas. No ride free area agreements were in effect in 2023.

C. Leasing of Transit Vehicles

KCC 4A.700.530 Leasing of transit vehicles

Program Summary
This section establishes the policy regarding the lease or rental of county-owned transit vehicles for charter operation by others. Minimum rental rates for the lease of transit vehicles are set to recover the marginal cost per service hour plus 10 percent. Different costs per service hour are assessed based on the size and type of vehicle leased. King County Metro did not lease any coaches in 2023.

D. Interagency Trip Agreements

KCC 4A.700.350 Interagency trip agreements

Program Summary
This section authorizes the County Executive to enter into agreements with other transit agencies for regional fare payment and revenue apportionment. In 2023, King County Metro participated with six other transit agencies in the regional ORCA fare payment system, as authorized by Ordinance 14598;[5] adopted on April 29, 2003.

[5] Ordinance 14598 [LINK]

E. Waiving or Discounting Fare or Pass Prices

KCC 4A.700.610 Waiving or discounting fare or pass prices

Program Summary
This section authorizes the King County Metro Transit Department General Manager to waive or discount fares for the purposes of attracting new ridership, testing new services and strategies, and supporting special transit programs.

Typically, the annual allowable loss in fare revenue for all such programs is limited to $350,000, however this amount was temporarily increased to $700,000 in 2023 to allow Metro to provide systemwide fare-free transit for the Major League Baseball All-Star Game,[6] with the goal of attracting new ridership and reducing strain on the regional transportation network. Including the two All-Star Game fare-free days, the total estimated revenue loss to King County Metro for waiving or discounting fare or pass prices in 2023 is $646,467 (see Appendix A). The following programs accounted for this total:

Adopt-A-Stop Program: The Adopt-A-Stop program encourages volunteers to "adopt" one or more non-sheltered bus zones to assist in regular cleaning and upkeep. For this service, volunteers are offered 60 free ride tickets per quarter. In 2023, 24,480 tickets were distributed to 102 volunteers for an estimated revenue loss of $22,552.

The Adopt-A-Stop program is not a funded program and was cut from the county budget in 2009-2010. King County Metro still supports the existing volunteers and may take on new volunteers in certain circumstances, but no longer offers free ride tickets to new volunteers.

Marketing/Community Outreach: Free ride tickets were distributed for marketing and community outreach events. A total of 16,530 tickets were distributed for an estimated revenue loss of $15,228.

MLB All-Star Game Fare-Free Days: King County Metro waived fare collection on July 10 and July 11 in support of the MLB All-Star Game. The goal of the promotion was to encourage new riders to use transit and to reduce strain on the transportation network as the events were expected to attract a significant number of attendees. King County Metro's foregone revenue loss for the weekend is estimated at $474,494.

New Year's Eve Free Rides: The annual New Year's Eve free ride promotion provided free transit on all King County Metro services to encourage safe travel. Revenue loss is estimated at $130,448.

Seafair Fleet Week: From August 1-6, King County Metro provided free transportation on all regular service for US Navy and US Coast Guard personnel in uniform or with proper identification. While Metro does not maintain counts for the number of free rides provided, foregone revenue is believed to be minimal.

Tickets for Customer Service/Other: 3,900 free ride tickets were distributed to riders who have had a negative experience on transit or for other miscellaneous reasons (e.g., lost wallet, took wrong bus, route change impacts, etc.). Estimated revenue loss was $3,593.

[6] Ordinance 19698 [LINK]

Transit GO Ticket Promotions: Approximately 19 Transit GO mobile day passes were redeemed for promotions supporting the Seattle/King County Clinic, Green Jobs Summit, and the Woodland Park Zoo Community Access program. Estimated revenue loss was $152.

F. Provision of Tickets to Human Services Agencies

KCC 4A.700.210 Provision of tickets to human services agencies

Program Summary
The King County Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) is responsible for determining the eligibility of, and directing ticket allocations to, human service agencies serving low income and homeless populations. King County Metro subsidizes 90 percent of the fare value of human services tickets, while human service agencies pay the remaining 10 percent. The subsidy value is not to exceed $4,000,000 per year.

A total of 893,240 tickets were sold through this program in 2023 to 107 participating agencies (see Appendix B for the full list of agencies), up 14 percent from 2022. This represents a total fare value of $2,078,270 with a King County Metro subsidy of $1,870,443 and a cost to the social service agencies of $207,827.

In 2023, Metro launched a modernization project for the Human Services Bus Ticket Program, working toward making ORCA-based human services tickets a permanent program and supporting the transition to a future without fareboxes. Metro assembled a project team that includes participants from DCHS, Sound Transit, King County Public Health, Seattle Department of Transportation, and Metro's Fare Media Sales department. The project team started stakeholder engagement with human service agency staff and clients, which continues into 2024, and will launch a transitional program, including permanent ORCA offerings and paper tickets, in 2025. The project is integrated into Metro's larger Reduced Fares Simplification project, which is a regional effort started in 2024 by Metro to evaluate and revamp the ORCA reduced fare programs for low-income, senior, and disabled riders.

V. Conclusion/Next Steps

Over the next year, Metro will work internally and with regional partners to align fare policies, modernize the ORCA system, and improve affordability for those with the greatest need while ensuring fare revenue targets are met. Key efforts include the development of a cashless transition plan to identify a timeline and strategies for eliminating cash payment onboard buses, as well as the Reduced Fares Simplification project, which is a regional effort started in 2024 by Metro to evaluate and overhaul the ORCA reduced fare programs for low-income, senior, and disabled riders.

In 2025, Metro will continue to work in partnership with the other ORCA agencies to begin implementing the strategies and recommendations coming out of the reduced fares work with the goals of improving the accessibility and utility of reduced fare programs for riders and easing the administrative burden for agencies.

VI. Appendices

A. 2023 Estimated Foregone Revenue from Waiving or Discounting Fares
B. 2023 Human Service Bus Ticket Social Service Agencies

2023 Estimated Foregone Revenue from Waiving or Discounting Fares

Free Ride Tickets	**Tickets**	**Estimated Foregone Revenue**
Marketing/Community Outreach	16,530	$15,228
Adopt-a-Stop	24,480	$22,552
Customer Service/Other	3,900	$3,593
Transit GO Promotions	**Tickets**	**Estimated Foregone Revenue**
Seattle/King County Clinic, Green Jobs Summit, Woodland Park Zoo	19	$152
Fare-Free Promotions	**Boardings**	**Estimated Foregone Revenue**
MLB All-Star Game	478,332	$474,494
NYE Free Fares	143,349	$130,448
Total		**$646,467**[7]

[7] Foregone revenue is the amount of expected fare revenue waived. New trips generated by fare promotions that otherwise would not have occurred do not count towards foregone revenue.

2023 Human Service Bus Ticket Social Service Agencies

- African Community Housing and Development
- Aileen's
- Arms Around You
- Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS) HST
- Atlantic Street Center HST
- Attain Housing
- Aurora Commons
- Ballard Food Bank
- Bellevue Fire Department
- Bread of Life Mission
- Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation
- Burien Severe Weather Shelter
- Catholic Community Services HSTB
- Chief Seattle Club
- City of Bellevue Probation Services
- City of Issaquah HST
- ColumbiaCare Services Inc.
- Communities In Schools of Seattle
- Community Roots Housing HST
- Compass Housing Alliance HST
- Congolese Community of Washington
- Congolese Integration Network HST
- Congregations for the Homeless
- Cowlitz Indian Tribe - Human Services Seattle
- DAWN - Domestic Abuse Women's Network
- Downtown Emergency Service Center
- Elizabeth Gregory Home
- Entre Hermanos
- Eritrean Association in Greater Seattle
- Evergreen Goodwill of Northwest Washington
- Evergreen Recovery Centers PCAP
- Evergreen Treatment Services REACH HST
- Facing Homelessness
- Fauntleroy Church United Church of Christ
- Federal Public Defender for Western Washington
- Friends of Youth
- H.O.P.E Center Resources
- Harborview Medical Center - Medical Respite
- HERO HOUSE NW
- Hopelink HST
- House of Mercy
- Imagine Housing

- International Rescue Committee
- Issaquah Food & Clothing Bank
- KC DAJD Community Corrections Division
- Kent Municipal Court - Probation Department
- King County Library System Foundation
- King County Veterans Program
- Lake City Partners Ending Homelessness
- Lifelong
- LifeWire HSBTP
- Literacy Source
- Low Income Housing Institute
- Lutheran Community Services Northwest
- Maple Valley Food Bank & Emergency Services
- Mercy Housing Northwest HST
- Mt. Baker Housing Association
- MultiCare Behavioral Health HSTB
- Nickelsville
- Northwest Education Access
- Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
- Operation Nightwatch
- Peer Washington
- Pike Market Senior Center HST
- Pioneer Human Services HST
- Pioneer Square Clinic HMC
- Plymouth Housing
- POCAAN
- Public Health Seattle King County
- Public Health Seattle/King - Jail Health Services
- Puget Sound OIC dba Puget Sound Training
- Queen Anne Helpline
- Reach HSTB
- Real Change
- Real Escape from the Sex Trade - REST
- Refugee Resettlement Office
- ROOTS Young Adult Shelter
- Seattle Conservation Corps
- Seattle Indian Health Board
- Seattle Indian Health Board HSTB
- Seattle Municipal Court
- Seattle's Union Gospel Mission
- SHARE/WHEEL
- Shoreline Community Care
- Solid Ground HST
- Solid Ground's Regional Access Point RAP

- Sound HST
- St. Stephen Housing Association
- St. Vincent de Paul of Seattle/King County
- Teen Feed - Seattle
- The Salvation Army HST
- The Seattle Public Library
- The Sophia Way
- Totem Star HST
- United Way of King County HS
- University District Food Bank
- Villa Comunitaria
- Vine Maple Place
- Virginia Mason dba Bailey Boushay House
- WA Department of Corrections
- Washington State Department of Corrections
- We Care Daily Clinics
- Weld Seattle
- West Seattle Food Bank
- World Relief Seattle HS Ticket
- YMCA of Greater Seattle HST
- YWCA Seattle | King | Snohomish