King County
Auditor's Office

KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

SEPTEMBER 29, 2026

Regional Transit Safety and Security Task Force Needs to Implement Leading Practices to Ensure Successful Regional Coordination and Performance Management

TO:

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FROM:

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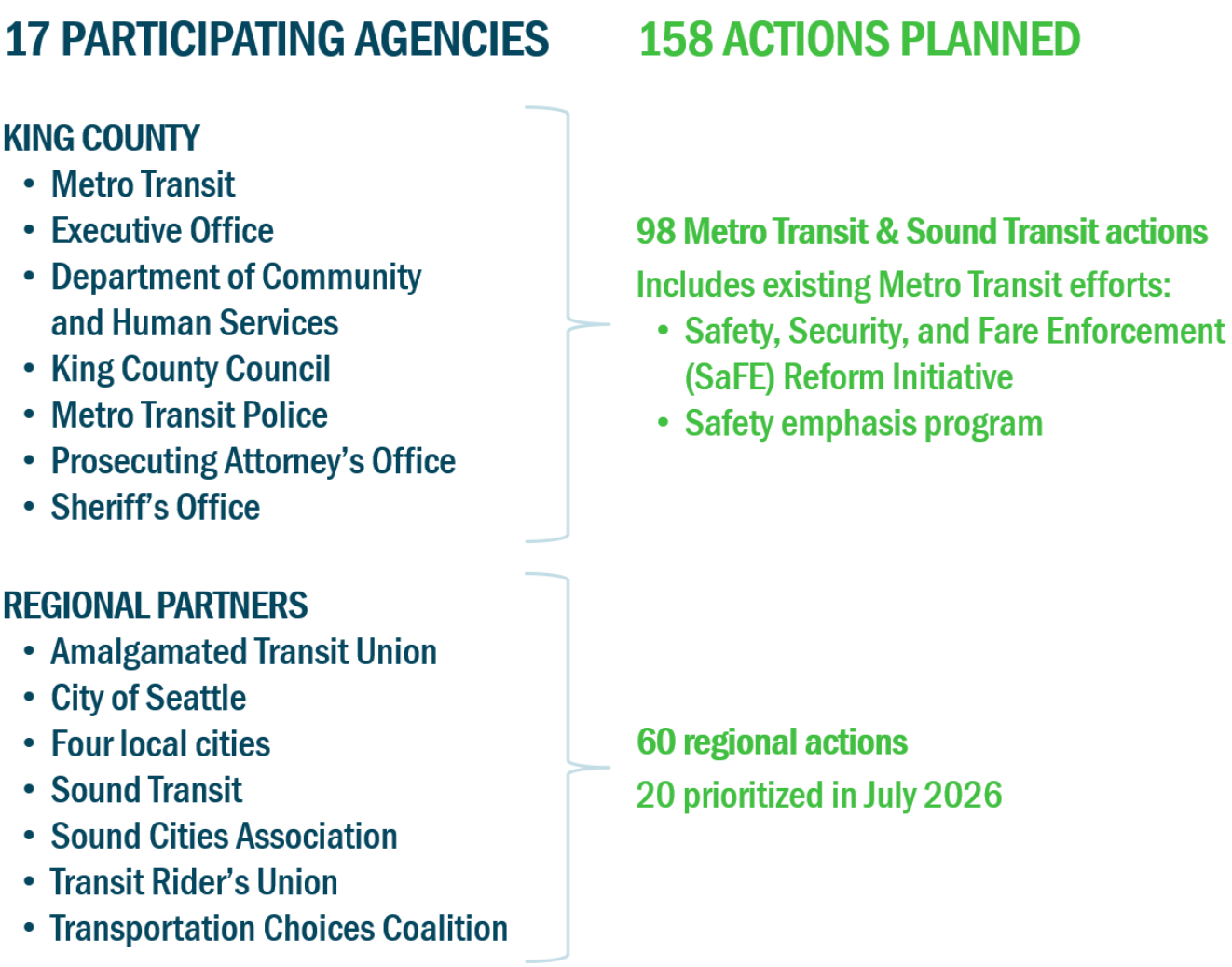
King County Metro Transit and its partners started a multi-year, multi-jurisdictional effort in 2025 to improve transit safety under the Regional Transit Safety and Security Task Force. This is a complex effort that will require robust management and coordination to implement successfully. After the murder of transit operator Shawn Yim, the King County Council worked with Metro Transit and the Amalgamated Transit Union 587 to convene the Regional Transit Safety and Security Task Force (Task Force), as set forth in Council Motion 16783. Participants from across the region provided input, including representatives from labor groups, transit operators, agency leadership, law enforcement, city officials, behavioral health providers, care responders, transit riders, and community organizations.

We are writing this letter because we identified several potential challenges and risks associated with an effort of this size and complexity, and we are sharing leading practices that help mitigate these challenges and risks. The Task Force effort resulted in production of an implementation plan that Metro Transit presented to the King County Council in October 2025, which included over 160 potential actions Metro Transit and its partners would undertake. Metro Transit and Sound Transit will implement nearly 100 actions directly under its control, while the remaining 60 actions require partnership with other government and community organizations in the region (see exhibit A). Some of those actions include integrating significant existing safety and security efforts, such as the Safety, Security, and Fare Enforcement Reform and the safety emphasis program. This means Metro Transit will have both an implementing role and facilitating role to help ensure the success of the Task Force.

EXHIBIT A: The 2025 Regional Transit Safety and Security Task Force Implementation Plan includes over 160 actions by at least 17 agencies.



Source: King County Auditor's Office based on King County Metro Transit documentation

We reviewed leading practices from federal and professional organizations in two areas: 1) steps for successful coordination, which applies to the Task Force's regional actions, and 2) performance management practices that apply to Metro Transit's internal work as well as the Task Force's regional actions. This letter includes summaries of the criteria we reviewed. Additional details can be found in the source documents listed in the appendix.

Before our audit work begins, Metro Transit should use the criteria below to inform Task Force planning and implementation. As of July 2026, Metro Transit and its partners have already started the process of discussing next steps and prioritizing actions. Metro Transit noted in its July 2026 briefing to the Regional Transit Committee that next steps include actions relevant to the criteria we include in this

letter, such as clarifying roles and responsibilities and developing reporting mechanisms to communicate about progress. Metro Transit has also begun organizing its internal work by defining and assigning key roles and responsibilities with staff. We will continue to monitor the progress Metro Transit and its partners make on the Task Force plan and will use the information in this letter as a starting point for a future audit of the program. The extent to which the components in this letter are in place at the time of the audit may form the basis for some of our audit findings and recommendations.

Regional Coordination Essential for Task Force Success

The King County Regional Transit Safety and Security Task Force aims to ensure that safety response is consistent across the regional transit system and to proactively prevent crises by aligning agencies under shared standards. As such, regional, cross-agency collaboration will be critical for the success of the Task Force implementation plan. Sustaining effective coordination can be difficult, particularly when the participating agencies span municipal, county, and non-profit organizations across the region. To help sustain successful regional coordination, Metro Transit should ensure its ongoing efforts incorporate and document the following five key elements:

1. **Create collaboration structures for participating entities**

   Metro Transit should create clear frameworks in which all participants can identify shared interests, mutual goals, and expectations. Metro Transit should also work with its partners to agree on shared terminology and policies to facilitate coordination and consistent operations across jurisdictional boundaries. Leading practices show that these efforts help to bridge organizational cultures, build mutual trust, and create clear structures to sustain collaborative efforts. Whenever possible, Metro Transit should formalize frameworks and agreements with memoranda of understanding or other clear, written documentation.

2. **Define roles, responsibilities, and authority among partners**

   In addition to creating a collaboration structure, Metro Transit and its partners should define roles and responsibilities among participants to ensure clear and consistent communication and implementation of Task Force actions. As part of this effort, leading practices state that it is important to name any gaps in authority or areas of overlapping authority among agencies and to create and document an agreed-upon strategy to address the gaps and to clarify responsibilities in the areas of overlapping authority.

3. **Enter into resource-sharing agreements with partners**

   Metro Transit and its partners should define the resources necessary for the implementation plan and should work with its partners to identify a strategy to meet resource needs. Leading

practices note that within the context of regional collaboration, resources refer to what is available within the region for sustaining and meeting the goal of the Task Force. Leading practices clarify that resources include:

- funding
- staffing
- data
- information systems.

Each of the items listed above are necessary for operations and tracking progress toward objectives. Metro Transit and its partners should document agreements on exchanging resources and should work early to name and resolve any barriers to sharing needed resources.

4. Include key perspectives across agencies in the development and revision of plans

Metro Transit and its partners should identify and include both decision-makers across agencies and frontline teams responsible for implementation early when developing or revising plans. Leading practices note that project goals gain momentum when senior leaders publicly prioritize them and are involved in shaping implementation plans early on. Leading practices also note that plans have better clarity about expectations and feasibility when agencies design goals with the involvement of delivery teams and frontline implementors.

To facilitate the inclusion of a range of perspectives, leading practices suggest designating a lead agency or individual with decision-making capabilities to help drive oversight and accountability. To keep buy-in across participating partners, it remains critical that Metro Transit and its partners also create opportunities for shared leadership and shared decision-making when appropriate.

5. Communicate publicly about the vision, structure, and progress of the coordinated efforts

Metro Transit and its partners should publish and regularly update public document(s), which outline the regional approach for achieving the objectives of the Task Force, including the processes and resources needed. Clear communication of the Task Force's goals and efforts bolster transparency and collaboration across agencies by creating a shared understanding of what is planned and what is underway. The 2025 Regional Transit Safety and Security Task Force Implementation Plan includes key elements such as a regional vision for a desired end state and goals. Metro Transit and its partners should provide regular updates on its progress toward implementing the plan's solutions and any operational challenges that arise.

Performance Management Essential to Making Improvements and Managing Resources

In its 2025 implementation plan, the Task Force developed some elements of performance management, including a vision, goals, and actions Metro Transit and its partners want to implement (see exhibit A, above). The steps below refer to additional performance management practices for Metro Transit to guide its internal work and to build on the steps listed in the previous section of this letter for its work with regional partners. Performance management will allow Metro Transit to make decisions about how best to focus limited resources on its internal efforts and help Metro Transit and its partners prioritize resources to complete regional actions. This will allow all agencies involved in implementation to make decisions about what to keep, improve, or stop doing. To help implement successful performance management, Metro Transit should ensure its ongoing efforts incorporate and document the following three key elements:

1. **Define outcomes and measures relevant to Task Force goals**

   Metro Transit should ensure there are short-term and long-term outcomes with standardized and consistent measures collected over time. This should also include comparators — for example, a baseline, targets, or comparable organizations' performance. Because some elements of the Task Force implementation plan involve work done by partner agencies, Metro Transit should convene its partner agencies in the development of measures that partners may be implementing.

2. **Define roles and structure for performance management**

   Leading practices recommend agencies maintain roles and structure to better ensure accountability for implementation and improvement. This includes embedding plan management efforts within Metro Transit and partner agencies and ensuring there are mechanisms of accountability for action. Within Metro Transit, management should establish an organizational structure, assign responsibility, and delegate authority to implement the plan. Metro Transit should also help facilitate the creation of roles and structure by its partners as part of its organizing role in the Task Force.

3. **Implement a transparent system to check and report on metrics and adjust where necessary**

   Metro Transit should ensure it has a documented approach to check and communicate progress toward short- and long-term outcomes and to improve efforts over time. This should include publicly reporting accurate and appropriate data to assess progress. Leading practices recommend that data is most useful when paired with a clear progress reporting mechanism, such as publicly available dashboards or scorecards.

Metro Transit should also ensure that once it assesses progress, there is a plan in place to use that information to reassess and update outcomes as needed. Since this effort might continue for a multi-year period, it should also include periodic top-level reviews and refinements of the performance management system itself. Metro Transit should also help facilitate and encourage the creation of processes with its partners to check metrics and work with partners to make adjustments as part of its organizing role in the Task Force. This should include a way to make sure participants still agree on outcomes.

Implementing and documenting the leading practices within this letter will help ensure that Metro Transit can more effectively manage the elements of the implementation plan within its control and coordinate elements requiring action by other agencies. This is important because, as noted in the ordinance establishing the Task Force, the King County Council intended the Task Force to bring together communities and transit partners to address issues of community safety and the safety and security of local transit operations.

Grant Dailey, Elise Garvey, and Ben Thompson conducted the analysis for this letter. If you have any questions, or would like more information, please contact the King County Auditor's Office at KCAO@kingcounty.gov or 206-477-1033.

NOT AN AUDIT • This report is not an audit as defined in Generally Accepted Auditing Standards, but conforms to similar requirements for independence, objectivity, and quality.

Appendix: Leading Practice Sources

- **American Public Transportation Association**. "A Handbook for Measuring Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality." November 2011.
- **American Public Transportation Association**. "Security Plan." July 25, 2023. https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-SS-ISS-RP-006-23.pdf.
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- **King County Auditor's Office.** "Foundational Elements of Department Management: Essential Tools and Audit Criteria." October 28, 2020. https://cdn.kingcounty.gov/-/media/king-county/independent/governance-and-leadership/government-oversight/auditors-office/reports/papers/governance-2020.pdf.
- **National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Transportation Research Board.** "A Methodology for Performance Measurement and Peer Comparison in the Public Transportation Industry." 2010. https://www.nationalacademies.org/publications/14402.
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- **US Department of Transportation.** "Regional Transportation Operations Collaboration and Coordination." January 1, 2002. https://tmcpfs.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/cfprojects/uploaded_files/Regional%20Ops%20Collaboration.pdf
- **US Government Accountability Office.** "Government Performance Management: Insights from Subject-Matter Specialists on Addressing Crosscutting Performance Challenges." June 23, 2026. https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-26-108601.
- **US Government Accountability Office.** "Government Performance Management: Leading Practices to Enhance Interagency Collaboration and Address Crosscutting Challenges." May 24, 2023. https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-105520.
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