

Specialized Transportation Services Policy and Data Brief

PSRC's long-range plans call for ensuring mobility choices for people with special transportation needs, defined to include people with disabilities, older adults, youth, and people with low incomes. The [Coordinated Mobility Plan](#) includes strategies to achieve these mobility choices in compliance with federal and state law.

Data Findings

PSRC engaged in a data collection effort to provide more quantitative data associated with specialized transportation services. Based upon the latest data available in 2019, the overall number of people with special transportation needs in the region continues to grow. At the same time, the region's fixed route ridership reached its highest levels of ridership, with a 20% growth between 2010 and 2018. However, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit ridership decreased 17% during the same timeframe. PSRC's initial data collection efforts focused on improving data collected from transit agencies in the region as well as comparing that data to reports from specialized transportation providers to identify why the ADA paratransit ridership has decreased, what transportation services are available for people with mobility challenges, and who is being served by which service in the region.

Public Transit

Public transit agencies provide a variety of mobility services that support people requiring specialized transportation services.

Fixed Route

The fixed route system, including various types of rail, bus, and ferry service is designed to be accessible to people with special transportation needs. The fixed route system provides more freedom for people who cannot transport themselves due to age, income, or ability than other forms of public or specialized transportation. According to regionwide ORCA data, fixed route ridership of people with low incomes, older adults, and youth increased between 2014 and 2018 in the central Puget Sound. However, the fixed route ridership of people with disabilities decreased by 18% while there was an 11% increase in the number of people with disabilities (2014 and 2018 US Census ACS Data).

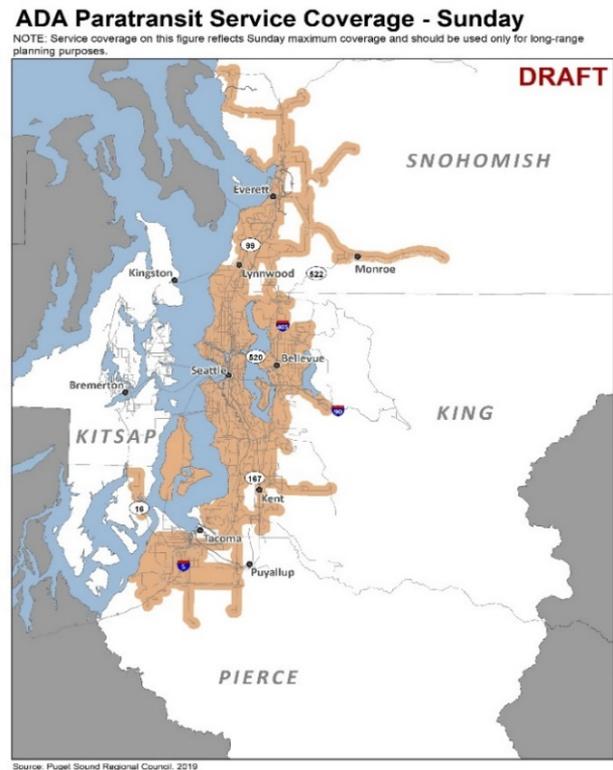
Ferry

The Washington State Ferries (WSF) collects data on people with disabilities with a "disabled permit," allowing the person a reduced fare in a vehicle using the WSF system. WSF data indicates the number of ferry riders who hold a disabled permit decreased by 12% between 2014 and 2018.

ADA Complementary Paratransit

The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) requires public transit agencies that operate fixed route service to provide “complementary” paratransit service to people with disabilities who cannot use fixed route bus or rail due to limited mobility. In general, ADA complementary paratransit service must be provided within 3/4- mile of a bus route or rail station, at the same hours and days that fixed route transit is provided. Most transit agencies in the region provide paratransit service beyond the minimum ADA requirements in coverage and eligibility. However, they do not provide full geographic coverage of the region. In addition, the ADA complementary paratransit services on weekends, especially on Sundays, are even more limited in coverage, span, and frequency. Figure 1 shows the bookends of ADA complementary paratransit services within the region for those who qualify for it.

Figure 1 ADA Paratransit Service Coverage Weekday vs. Sunday in PSRC region



Other Demand Response Services

Two transit agencies in the region provide demand response services that are not tied to their ADA paratransit obligations. King County Metro provides a Community Access Transportation (CAT) program which serves specific locations or operates as a community shuttle. Kitsap

Transit also provides additional demand response service to the general public, including Dial-a-Ride and TapRIDE.

Travel Training

Travel training helps riders needing specialized transportation services looking to familiarize themselves with transportation options. Most transit agencies in the region provide travel training on their fixed route systems. Three transit agencies shared data indicating a steady increase in number of travel trainings provided to people with special transportation needs since 2014. There is a need for more complete transit agency travel training data and more consistent performance measures for this topic.

Specialized Transportation Services Provided by Nonprofits and Human Service Agencies

PSRC also explored data on transportation services provided by specialized transportation providers. Based on data collected between 2015-2019, passenger trips on services provided by specialized transportation providers decreased by 9.6% and vehicle miles decreased by 3%. Also, the data indicates that the cost of providing these services increased nearly \$10 per ride (26%) in the 2017-2019 period.

Next Steps

PSRC is continuing the process of collecting data from a variety of specialized transportation providers in the region to better identify transportation needs and gaps of people with mobility challenges due to age, income, or ability. Also, further data collection and analysis is needed to identify why ADA paratransit ridership and specialized transportation ridership decreased in the region at a time when fixed route ridership was growing rapidly. More information will be provided in the Regional Transportation Plan and the update to the Coordinated Mobility Plan, both to be adopted in May 2022.