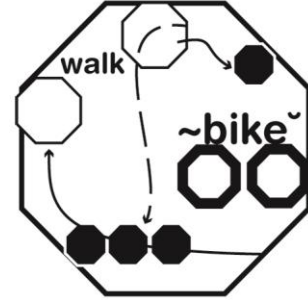


Special Needs Transportation



Background

Definition

Special needs transportation is any mode used by those defined as transportation disadvantaged or with a special transportation need. Transportation-disadvantaged people are those who are unable to transport themselves due to physical or cognitive limitations, income status, or age ([Washington state law, RCW 81.66.010](#)). This also includes special needs caregivers. Transportation includes buses that have regular stops, specialized services such as vans, cabulances and taxis that pick up people at the curb or door, rideshare programs, volunteer driver services, ferries, trains, or any federal, state, and local publicly funded transportation service or program.

Health, equity and sustainability considerations

The ability to access daily needs, including education, employment, and health care, is crucial to maintain quality of life.

Safe, reliable, and affordable public transportation is important for many special needs population, including seniors, people with disabilities, low income individuals, and youths to get to work, school, the doctor and the grocery store, and to maintain social contacts. Typically, the working poor spend a higher percentage of their income on transportation than those of higher means. In some areas of King County, infrequent schedules and limited span of service make it difficult for commuters who work nontraditional shifts or are school-aged children who need transportation after school and on weekends. Access to transportation can also be limited due to language and cultural barriers. Limited English proficient (LEP) populations often have limited access to transit because of lack of information about routes and services.

The primary mode of transportation for the majority of people in the Puget Sound region is a private vehicle. However, for those with special transportation needs, driving a car is not always an available or viable option.

47% of the central Puget Sound population fits the criteria for special needs transportation.

Nearly 80 million baby boomers turned 65 in 2011, and the Puget Sound region is experiencing this aging trend just like the rest of the country. In 2011, seniors 65 or older comprised 11 percent of the region's population. Beyond the complications associated with aging, some seniors have additional

transportation needs stemming from low-income status or having a disability.

Program and Policy Examples

Program examples

A variety of transportation programs and services serve special needs populations. Each program has a discrete service area, target population, and operating authority. The Puget Sound Regional Council's

[Coordinated Transit- Human Services Transportation Plan](#) lists the types of transportation programs and services offered in King County that go beyond an established route and schedule.

Demand Response Services. Demand response services operate in response to calls from passengers or their agents to the transportation provider, who then dispatches a vehicle to pick up the passengers and transport them to their destinations. Demand response services are commonly provided through [ADA paratransit](#) or non-ADA paratransit services. More information at the Transit Cooperative Research Program's [Resource Guide for ADA and Non-ADA Paratransit](#).

Shared Rides. Vans or small buses operating as a ride sharing arrangement, providing transportation to a group of individuals directly to a regular destination. More information at [King County Metro's Rideshare website](#).

Door-to-Door Service. Specialized form of paratransit service where a driver meets customers at their door and walks with them to the vehicle and then to the door of their destination. More information at [King County Metro's ACCESS door-to-door shuttle website](#).

Program Transportation. Specific program services, such as medical, community service, and education, including school buses, and employment.

Training Programs. Programs for individuals or groups to increase the skills, knowledge, and abilities for those using transportation services and travel training professionals. More information at [King County Mobility Coalition's Community Transit Travel videos](#).

Financial Subsidies. Financial assistance to support special needs transportation services and programs. King County Metro's Taxi Scrip program is an example of a financial subsidy program. Metro Taxi Scrip Program provides a subsidy to low-income King County residents age 18 to 64 who have a disability or are age 65 and over. Registered individuals can purchase taxi scrip for 50 percent of the face value of taxi scrip.

Information, Referral, and Assistance. Refers to ways to get information, resources, services, and support.

Development regulations and model ordinances

The federal Interagency Coordination Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) works "to continue to improve mobility, employment opportunities, and access to community services for persons who are transportation disadvantaged." One of the council's strategic goals is to "expand the coordinated human-service transportation infrastructure." The council works with the [United We Ride](#) initiative, which facilitates coordination and provides funding for state and local governments.

State-level coordination is achieved through the Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation (ACCT). The ACCT supports countywide coalitions to create local plans that inventory available services in their area and provide strategies to streamline service delivery. [The King County Mobility Coalition](#) is the coordinating coalition for King County. They work to assess the needs of their local community and current transportation network and provide recommendations to improve the system.

How is it used locally?

[See the full list of special needs transportation programs in King County.](#)

Fixed Route Service. King County Metro's buses are [ADA accessible](#) and offer a variety of features to make transit use more accessible for all users. All Metro buses have lifts or ramps for wheelchair and scooter users and others who use a walker or cane or simply have trouble climbing steps. [Priority seats](#) in the front of buses are reserved for seniors and people with disabilities. A driver may help to make room in the priority seating area if it is currently full. Most mobility devices can be taken on the bus. Additionally, Metro buses are equipped with [automated stop announcements and reader boards](#) to let riders know when the bus has reached their stop or destination. This system assists riders unfamiliar with a neighborhood, people who ride the bus infrequently, and riders with disabilities.

Drivers are required to permit any customer with [a service animal](#) to ride King County Metro buses. This includes animals-in-training accompanied by a trainer or person with a disability. Service animals for persons with disabilities ride for free. No permit is required, but the driver may ask if your animal is a service animal to determine if a fare is appropriate.

Bus Buddy. The [Bus Buddy program](#) is designed to give a safe, convenient and personal introduction to using public transit with individual assistance or in groups within King County. Training is available in 17 languages. The program's goal is to give riders the confidence to travel in and around the area. Participants receive training and support from their Bus Buddy until they feel they are ready to ride solo. The program also offers group excursions.

Medicaid Transportation. Within King County, the private nonprofit agency [Hopelink serves as the Medicaid broker](#). Under contract with the Department of Social and Health Services' Medical Assistance Administration, Hopelink coordinates transportation to and from medical appointments for low-income residents on Medicaid assistance. Hopelink uses contracted providers, fixed-route transit passes, gas cards, and volunteers to provide service.

School Bus Transportation. King County currently has 19 school districts and one Educational Service District that provide school bus transportation. Since schools are required to pay for the transportation of students outside a one-mile radius of the school, many districts are no longer transporting their regular education students who live within the one-mile radius. This has created safety concerns, in particular for families who live in rural areas where there may not be sidewalks or other pathways to the school.

Regional Reduced Fare Permit. [The Regional Reduced Fare Permit \(RRFP\)](#) enables seniors 65 and older, people with disabilities, and their attendants to ride on the region's transit system at a significant discount.

With an RRFP, riders can buy a Metro-only monthly reduced fare pass for \$5.50 or an annual reduced fare sticker for \$66. This sticker qualifies as payment for Metro's reduced bus fare and is good for 25 cents toward an Access Transportation fare. The pass is also valid for full fare on Sound Transit's Link light rail.

Performance evaluation/success stories

The *Hyde Shuttle program* transports seniors and people with disabilities to hot meal programs, medical appointments, senior centers, grocery stores, and other local destinations.

Named in honor of Lillian May Hyde, a longtime Seattle resident and Access Transportation user whose generous bequest started community service in the Beacon Hill and Rainer Valley. Ms. Hyde's legacy has grown to serve countless seniors (55 and older) and people with disabilities. Through a partnership with Senior Services of Seattle, the Washington State Department of Transportation, and Seattle/King County Aging and Disability Services' 38 vans now serve 24 communities in King County.

The Hyde Shuttles help to counteract the challenges that age, income, disability, geographic obstacles and cultural and language barriers pose for many people. The first Hyde Shuttle started in 1997, with the goal of providing user-friendly, reliable, community-based, sustainable special needs transportation. The program has expanded over the years in response to growing demand. In 2013, Hyde Shuttles transported over 3,000 people to life-sustaining and life-enriching activities. The Hyde Shuttles fall into two categories: Nutrition Vans and Community Vans. The Nutrition Vans transport refugee and immigrant elders to culturally sensitive meal programs, and Community Vans provide transportation within specific communities or neighborhoods.

The Hyde Shuttles offer the personalized alternative to public transportation that many seniors and people with disabilities require. The Hyde Shuttle accessible vehicles offer adaptable demand-response transportation. The Hyde Shuttle is easy to sign up for and use. With a single telephone call rider, can register and make a reservation for service. No fare is collected, although donations are gladly accepted. The Hyde Shuttles' focus on serving local communities allows efficient grouping of rides that reduce rider wait and trip times.

Implementation

Opportunities for funding

The majority of special needs transportation funding comes from local sale taxes and is used by transit agencies to operate accessible fixed-route and ADA complementary paratransit service. Federal and state resources also fund special needs transportation programs, although available resources are insufficient to meet demand. There are, however, opportunities for funding specific projects.

The federal United We Ride initiative [offers funding for specific projects](#) including transportation for veterans, school transit, and tribal transit services.

The National Center on Senior Transportation hosts a [collection of grant opportunities](#) on their website. These grants all focus on transportation for seniors and aging populations. In 2011, the National Center on

Senior Transportation awarded King County a Breaking New Ground Grant to fund, in part, transportation for [immigrant and refugee elders in King County](#).

The Puget Sound Regional Council's competitive [Special Needs Coordinated Grant Program](#) funds eligible projects using Federal Transit Administration funds dedicated for special needs transportation. The Washington State Department Transportation (WSDOT) also administers federal and state special needs transportation funds through a consolidated grant program.

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) [Grant Program](#) helps provide access, mobility and independence to Washington residents. Made possible by state and federal funds, these grants, along with PSRC Special Needs Coordinated Grants funds, provide elderly and people with disabilities transit services within and between cities, and funding to purchase vehicles and other equipment. Funding is also available to improve public transportation in and between rural communities.

Considerations for local implementation

Gaps in special needs transportation fall into one of the following five categories according to the Puget Sound Regional Council's Coordinated Transit- Human Services Transportation Plan: temporal, institutional, infrastructure, and awareness. Coordinating services between multiple service providers is also proving to be a challenge.

Spatial. Spatial gaps refer to locations that are underserved or not served at all by transportation services. To be cost-efficient, public transportation service is primarily oriented towards the Puget Sound's urbanized area providing service to, from and between activity and employment centers leaving spatial gaps in low density suburban and rural areas where transit service is either unavailable or inadequate to meet the daily needs of special needs populations.

Temporal. Temporal gaps occur when transportation service is not available at times when it is needed by special needs transportation populations. In some King County areas, transportation options are inadequate outside of peak hours—very early in the morning, middle of the day, after 7 p.m., and on weekends.

Institutional. Institutional gaps occur when rules, regulations, and requirements that govern transportation service inadvertently create obstacles to use. In King County, connection with ferries is difficult for paratransit vehicles, and paratransit systems generally do not provide same-day service.

Infrastructure. Infrastructure gaps occur when a lack of physical or technological infrastructure prevents individuals from accessing needed transportation options. In King County, many neighborhoods do not have sidewalks, curb cuts and safe pedestrian crossings, making it difficult for seniors and people with disabilities to get to a bus stop or transit center. Often bus stops lack weather protection and benches needed by the special needs population. Even when pedestrian crossings are signalized, sufficient crossing times are not long enough for seniors, children, and individuals with mobility impairments to safely cross.

Awareness. Awareness gaps occur when individual riders and social service providers are not fully informed about available transportation options. In King County, language and cultural barriers prevent riders and clients from using available transportation options, social service agencies do not always have adequate

information regarding available transportation choices and may be adverse to referring clients to “fixed-route transit.”

Challenges to implementation

Funding essential services for special needs populations has and will continue to face funding limitations. The region’s public transportation agencies rely heavily on unstable sales tax receipts that fluctuate with economic conditions. Therefore, sustaining existing service and growing service to meet demand and fill gaps is problematic. As a result of the 2008 recession, all of the region’s transit agencies were forced to make cuts to fixed-route services and more cuts are on the way. Since cuts to fixed-route service mean a corresponding reduction to complementary ADA paratransit service, the effect of mobility on special needs populations is often severe. Depending on local human service organizations and non-profit transportation providers to fill new service gaps is problematic given the funding challenges these organizations face sustaining.

Resources

The National Center for Senior Transportation [Best Practices](#) (2013)

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department’s Healthy Community Planning Toolbox—Policy Intervention Tool: [Access to Opportunity](#) (2013)