

2023 TRANSIT INTEGRATION REPORT



2023 Transit Integration Report // November 2023

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Introduction

The 2023 Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) Transit Integration Report documents transit coordination activities over the last year in the central Puget Sound region.

The goal of this report is to share information with elected officials and the public, highlighting coordination successes, ongoing work and challenges, and emerging opportunities for future coordination. Successful transit integration requires coordination not only among transit providers, but also with local jurisdictions, state and county governments, and other partners in the region.

The Transit Integration Report also fulfills the state reporting requirement¹ that the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) develop an annual report for the transportation committees of the state legislature summarizing the status of transit system coordination in the central Puget Sound region.²

There are six policy areas the state law requires the report to address. Icons will be used to indicate where these topics are addressed throughout the report:



Integrating marketing efforts



Aligning fare structures



Integrating service planning



Coordinating long-range planning, including capital projects planning and implementation



Integrating other administrative functions and internal business processes as appropriate



Integrating certain customer-focused tools and initiatives

The report also provides updates on projects the state funds through the Transit Coordination grant program. Funding levels for the competitive grant program vary from one budget cycle to the next. Two million dollars was allocated to fund projects for the 2023–2025 biennium.

¹ RCW 35.58.2796(2)(a)

² For purposes of the report, RCW 35.58.2796(2)(a) defines the region as counties with a population of 700,000 or more that border Puget Sound. As of the 2020 U.S. Census, this includes King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties. Since PSRC has historically created this report, Kitsap County transit activity is also included, as it is part of the regional planning area.

Link T Line Fare Introduction Aligned with Hilltop Extension Opening



The initial segment of Tacoma Link light rail (known as the T Line) began running 20 years ago, from Tacoma Dome Station to the city's Theater District. Thanks in part to a fare subsidy agreement with the Downtown Tacoma Partnership, riders did not have to pay a fare to ride the T Line until the first extension opened in September 2023.

The Hilltop Extension of the T Line, which opened in September, doubled its length and added seven new stations to serve the Stadium District, hospitals, and the Hilltop neighborhood. The T Line already had multimodal connections at hubs like the Tacoma Dome station, which is also served by Pierce Transit local bus and Runner service, ST Express buses, ST Sounder trains, and intercity services like Amtrak Cascades and Greyhound. However, the extension has created new connection opportunities beyond the major hubs like the Tacoma Dome and Commerce Street & Pacific Avenue. Riders can now transfer between the T Line and more Pierce Transit local bus routes, like Routes 28 and 57. The extension also improves transit access for schools, like Stadium High School and the Evergreen State College Tacoma campus, and major medical facilities, like Tacoma General and St. Joseph Medical Center.

After a robust public engagement process in 2021–2022, the Sound Transit Board adopted a \$2 fare for the T Line, which is consistent with the current Pierce Transit bus fare. T Line fares were implemented on September 16 when the extension opened. As with all transit services in the region, people younger than 19 ride free on the T Line. A reduced \$1 fare is charged for ORCA LIFT and Regional Reduced Fare Permit riders (seniors and people with disabilities).

To raise public awareness of the T Line service extension and ease the transition to paying fares, Sound Transit, partnering with the City of Tacoma, Pierce Transit, and community organizations, completed extensive marketing and community engagement in the weeks following the opening. As part of this outreach, Sound Transit has distributed 10,000 ORCA cards to residents in communities around the T Line extension through community events and direct mail. Direct mail proved to be a successful strategy in building awareness and getting residents enrolled in ORCA and ORCA LIFT when the Northgate extension of the Link 1 Line opened two years ago.

Sound Transit and Pierce Transit are both working to get more eligible community members enrolled in the ORCA LIFT program to reduce the cost burden of transit fares for lower-income riders on all transit services in the region.

Pierce Transit Joins ORCA LIFT Program and Sound Transit Reduces LIFT Fare



The region's transit agencies have long been committed to providing quality service that is financially accessible to all residents. Several years ago, Kitsap Transit was one of the first providers in the region to introduce a reduced fare program for low-income riders. In 2015, King County introduced ORCA LIFT, a program to ensure low-income riders were not cost burdened by an increase in King County Metro fares at that time.

Since then, other transit agencies have joined ORCA LIFT, which uses the regional fare payment system (ORCA) to create a fare classification for single rides and passes at a reduced cost for adults with a pre-tax household income below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. Customers can save up to 70% on transit fares, depending on which services they use.

This February, an important milestone was reached when the Pierce Transit Board of Commissioners voted to join the ORCA LIFT program. With this addition, ORCA LIFT is now accepted across the central Puget Sound region on Community Transit, Everett Transit, King County Metro, Kitsap Transit, Pierce Transit, Sound Transit, the Seattle Streetcar, and the Seattle Center Monorail.

Additionally, over the last few years some transit agencies have been lowering the fare charged to ORCA LIFT cardholders to make it consistent with the fare charged to seniors and people with disabilities participating in the Regional Reduced Fare Permit (RRFP) program. In March 2023 Sound Transit reduced their ORCA LIFT fare to \$1 per trip. This decision was made after completing a six-month demonstration project. The project's robust public engagement demonstrated strong public support for reducing the ORCA LIFT fare to \$1 or less.

ORCA LIFT cardholders can now use the following services in the region for \$1: Everett Transit bus, King County Metro bus (including DART and MetroFlex), Kitsap Transit bus and local foot ferry service, Pierce Transit bus (including Runner service), Seattle Streetcar, and Sound Transit bus and rail (including Link and Sounder).

The ORCA regional fare payment system makes continual adjustments and improvements like these possible, with the power to easily change fares across the system or add new card options, like ORCA LIFT or the Free Youth Transit Pass.

Regional High-Capacity Transit Network Continues to Grow



Sound Transit Plans for “Starter Line” of Link 2 Line on Eastside

In August, Sound Transit announced it will open the first segment of the Link 2 Line (formerly East Link) in Spring 2024, operating between South Bellevue and the Overlake area of Redmond. The 2 Line was initially scheduled to open this year between the Northgate and Redmond Technology stations, but construction quality issues with the I-90 bridge concrete plinths required rebuilding portions of the line, delaying the full opening. Given that the Eastside portions of the project were not affected by these issues, Sound Transit has opted to open the segment from the South Bellevue to Redmond Technology stations, serving 6.5 miles and eight stations, with only a one-year delay. The full 2 Line will open in 2025, running 34 miles between Lynnwood City Center and Downtown Redmond.

Sound Transit and King County Metro (including the Rail Division) are working closely together on this interim service. ST Express routes serving East King County (including the popular Route 550), King County Metro’s RapidRide B Line, and other local Metro routes will remain unchanged and will supplement the initial Link 2 Line service until the line fully opens in 2025, when they will be adjusted to maximize connections to Link light rail service. This coordination will support ongoing reliable regional mobility for riders across transit modes and services.

Preparation Continues for Link 1 Line Extension to Lynnwood

The extension of the Link 1 Line from Northgate to Lynnwood is still scheduled to open in the fall of 2024. Unfortunately, the issues on the I-90 bridge track segment will affect how frequently Link service runs between Downtown Seattle and Lynnwood on the 1 Line when it opens. This segment was designed to combine 1 Line and 2 Line services to provide more frequent trains between Lynnwood and Downtown Seattle. Passengers getting on in Lynnwood could board either a 1 Line or 2 Line train to Downtown Seattle, where the 1 Line then continues south to Angle Lake and the 2 Line splits off east toward Judkins Park and across the I-90 bridge.

This service plan relied on a fully operational 2 Line and access to the new maintenance facility on the Eastside, which isn’t possible until the infrastructure supporting tracks across the I-90 bridge are completed. Instead, the 1 Line extension to Lynnwood will open in Fall 2024, as planned, but with trains departing every 8–10 minutes. Once the 2 Line segment across I-90 opens—now expected in 2025—frequency will increase on the Lynnwood-to-Downtown Seattle segment.

Community Transit and King County Metro have coordinated service plans with Sound Transit this year and for 2024. While earlier planning assumed the 2 Line would open in 2023 and the extension to Lynnwood in 2024, these plans have been adjusted for the new opening dates.

Flexibility, coordination, and continual community engagement around these multi-agency, multi-modal planning efforts are critical to ensuring clear communication with customers and a consistent level of frequent, reliable service, regardless of mode.

Moving Forward on Stride BRT

This summer the Sound Transit Board adopted the final budget and schedule for the new Stride bus rapid transit (BRT) system. The project includes the S1 and S2 lines, which will provide north-south service along I-405 and SR 518 between Lynnwood Transit Center and Burien Transit Center, the S3 Line serving the SR 522/NE 145th corridor from Shoreline to Bothell (with connecting service options to Woodinville), and Bus Base North, a new base to service the full BRT fleet and some of the ST Express bus fleet.

WSDOT and Sound Transit have been working closely planning several highway and interchange improvement projects to prepare for BRT service. In September, the two agencies officially broke ground on the Stride system with a project at I-405 and 85th Street in Kirkland.

Additionally, Sound Transit has worked with local jurisdictions on siting Bus Base North. After evaluating more than 30 sites for the maintenance facility, Sound Transit selected a 12.5-acre site in the Canyon Park Subarea of Bothell, which best met the selection criteria, such as size, zoning considerations, and proximity to the Stride routes on I-405 and SR 522. Sound Transit and Bothell completed a transfer of development rights study and have turned to implementation to ensure the development capacity of the Canyon Park regional growth center is retained with the construction of the bus base.

Bus Base North will include a maintenance and operations building, a parking structure, facilities for bus washing, and above-ground re-fueling and charging infrastructure, among other amenities. The base will support midday and overnight charging for Stride's battery electric buses and support Sound Transit's efforts to move toward a full zero-emissions fleet for ST Express and Stride buses.

RapidRide H Opens, Work on G Line Continues

In March, King County Metro launched its seventh RapidRide corridor, the H Line, upgrading the high-ridership Route 120 to Metro's most frequent and reliable service tier. The project included transit improvements along the 12-mile route from downtown Seattle to Burien (via Delridge, West Seattle, and White Center) to improve speed, reliability, and customer experience. Seattle, King County, and Burien's investments in the project also aimed to improve safety for pedestrians accessing transit service.

Metro has also continued its partnership with the City of Seattle on the RapidRide G Line with significant construction progress this year ahead of completion scheduled for 2024. The RapidRide G Line will run from Colman Dock in Downtown Seattle east to Madison Valley via

First Hill and the Central District. The Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) has invested in multimodal improvements on Madison and Spring streets that will facilitate better transit service and access to transit along this corridor.

Construction Complete on Multimodal Colman Dock Upgrades



With multiple agencies operating ferry service to/from downtown Seattle and limited shoreside capacity, coordination of operations and planning is critical for Washington State Ferries and passenger-only ferry service on the King County Water Taxi and Kitsap Transit Fast Ferries.

A key multimodal facility for regional ferry travel is Colman Dock, located off Alaskan Way between Marion Street and Yesler Way. WSDOT began construction in 2017 to upgrade the terminal, which was aging and seismically vulnerable. Foundational improvements to the dock itself were completed in 2021, and the new passenger building opened in late 2022. This past August, the new entry building and elevated pedestrian connector were completed, connecting the passenger building to street level on Alaskan Way with new elevators and stairs. Ferry passengers who have been shifted around the facility during the last six years of construction can now use the Colman Dock facilities and their amenities, as designed.

The project also included building a new terminal for passenger-only ferries on the south side of Colman Dock (Pier 50) for King County Water Taxi and Kitsap Transit Fast Ferries, which opened in 2019. Kitsap Transit also began the scoping process for its Seattle Fast Ferry Terminal Project in 2022 to evaluate options for an additional downtown Seattle landing site to better meet existing demand and plan for future growth. (Pier 50 can only accommodate two vessels at a time and is currently used for five ferry routes.)

The Colman Dock project has also been coordinated with the redesign and rebuilding of Seattle's Waterfront, led by the City of Seattle's Office of the Waterfront in coordination with WSDOT. After the former Alaskan Way Viaduct was removed in 2019, work began on a redesigned Alaskan Way with new pedestrian and bicycle facilities and crossings, parks and public spaces, and other amenities. The Marion Street Bridge, connecting 1st Avenue to Colman Dock, was a joint project between the City of Seattle and WSDOT. The bridge provides a key pedestrian access point to the multimodal terminal and should be completed before the end of 2023.

Other remaining work near the new Colman Dock, including some street and utility work in front of the entry building and reconfiguring the vehicle entry lanes, should be completed within the next year as part of the Seattle Waterfront project.

Everett Transit, SnoPUD, and King County Metro Partner to Give a Second Life to Old Batteries



Everett Transit and the Snohomish County Public Utility District (SnoPUD) have partnered on the electrification of Everett Transit’s fixed-route bus fleet, including a project to install inductive fast chargers for electric buses and evaluate their impact on the electric grid. Beginning in 2022, the two agencies are also working on a demonstration project with tech/energy startup BattGenie to assess onsite energy storage potential at transit facilities.

The demonstration project is using old batteries from King County Metro that no longer fully function for vehicles because the charging capacity has depleted over time. When dozens of these old batteries are combined, they can still store enough power to offer a potential backup power supply for bus charging. The concept is that software, like BattGenie’s, can manage battery charging for transit fleets, maximizing charging during off-peak hours and using stored energy (like that stored on these old batteries) if charging must happen during peak energy consumption hours.

The project is part of an overall Proof of Concept testing. The first stage was utilizing BattGenie’s battery management system (BMS) to improve battery cycle life. The next stage is testing on a larger scale, increasing the size of the Battery Energy Storage System (BESS). The overall project is expected to last three years or until the batteries are no longer viable.

Transit Coordination Grants for 2023–2025 Biennium Awarded to Marketing and Fare Projects



In June, WSDOT announced that the \$2 million from the 2023–2025 State Transportation Budget allocated to the Transit Coordination Grant program was awarded to two projects aimed at improving transit coordination in the central Puget Sound region. \$1.7 million was awarded to Sound Transit and partner agencies for ORCA and ORCA LIFT enhancements. Community Transit, Everett Transit, King County Metro, Kitsap Transit, and Pierce Transit all joined as partners on the project. Grant funds will be used to improve integration of ORCA LIFT into the ORCA system, develop regional ORCA LIFT outreach materials, and/or automate ticket distribution for ORCA. These measures are designed to improve the passenger experience and administrative efficiency.

The other \$300,000 was allocated to King County Metro and partners to continue marketing and educating communities about the Free Youth Transit Pass introduced last year. For the 2022-2023 Fiscal Year, \$500,000 in Transit Coordination Grant funding was awarded to marketing this major policy change (see [2022 Report](#)). Beyond the initial educational campaigns, agencies have continued working together to build relationships with school districts and youth organizations and utilize best practices in transportation demand management strategies to encourage young people to ride transit. All of the region's transit agencies have joined as partners: Community Transit, Everett Transit, Kitsap Transit, Pierce Transit, Seattle Department of Transportation, Sound Transit, and Washington State Ferries.