

**From:** [Nicole Barker](#)  
**To:** [RTP Public Comment](#)  
**Subject:** The Regional Transportation Plan feedback  
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**Attachments:** [Outlook-q2gbivkb.png](#)

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As an organization serving BIPOC, immigrant and refugee, multilingual families, as well as children, youth, and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), we appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the Regional Transportation Plan. Our community's lived experiences offer critical insight into how transportation systems impact safety, accessibility, independence, and equitable access to opportunity. Because our populations are often overlooked in mainstream planning processes [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] we are so grateful for this opportunity. Thank you.

## **1. Safety Concerns for Individuals with IDD and Neurodivergent Youth**

### **1.1 Elopement (Running/Wandering) Risk**

#### **Key risks:**

- Pacific Highway and surrounding corridors are *high-traffic, high-speed, high-injury* zones.
- Youth can elope “in a blink of a second,” putting them at risk of being struck by a vehicle.
- Proximity to bodies of water increases drowning risk—recent tragic incidents in the community illustrate this danger.

#### **What the city must consider:**

- Fencing and physical barriers around transit platforms and sidewalks.
- Designated safe zones near stations where caregivers can redirect children.
- Additional attention to areas near water, steep grades, and fast-moving streets.

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## **2. Exposure to Criminal Activity and Public Drug Use at Transit Stations**

- Open drug use
- Verbal harassment
- Unpredictable behavior from individuals in crisis
- General environments that do not feel child-safe

#### **Impact on the community:**

- Families cannot safely use public transit, which reduces access to employment, healthcare, and services.
- Vulnerable youth and adults with IDD may experience trauma or sensory overwhelm.
- Some families will not set foot in certain transit areas, making “equity” goals

unattainable.

**Key nuance:**

Parents emphasize that increased police presence can feel unsafe for BIPOC communities. They want safety *without criminalizing vulnerability*.

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**3. Accessibility of Transit Information (Language, Vision, Cognitive Processing)**

**3.1 Small or Inaccessible Fonts at Bus Stops**

- Printed schedules and information signage are too small for many individuals, especially elders or those with visual processing challenges.
- There is no tactile, auditory, or multi-language support.

**3.2 Language Access Gaps**

- Riders need multilingual digital and posted information.
- Families suggested digital language supports at transit hubs.

**3.3 Real-Time Route Access for Caregivers**

This community relies on caregivers or case managers to support safe travel.

They need:

- GPS/Bluetooth connection showing where the youth’s bus or train is
  - Automatic alerts when the rider boards or exits
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**4. Lack of Staff Training on Supporting Riders with IDD**

Examples from your programs:

- Youth fall asleep on the bus and miss their stop, losing employment as a result.
- Drivers often fail to check on disoriented, confused, or wandering passengers.

**Successful model:**

Pierce County Transit has begun **training all transit drivers** on supporting riders with disabilities after collaboration with community organizations.

Your recommendation:

Replicate this training region-wide, ideally co-designed with IDD-serving organizations.

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**5. Physical Accessibility of Bus Stops and Approaches**

**5.1 Long walking distances to bus stops**

This disproportionately impacts:

- Individuals with mobility challenges

- Youth prone to seizures triggered by exertion
- Families with strollers, wheelchairs, or multiple children

## 5.2 Unsafe or poorly lit locations

Example:

- Bus stop near Kent-Meridian High School is completely dark at night, with riders waiting in unsafe conditions.

## 5.3 No seating or shelter

- Many stops have nowhere to sit.
- This is physically dangerous for people who cannot stand long or who experience seizures.
- Severe weather (rain, snow, ice) regularly strands riders without cover.

## 5.4 Terrain barriers

- Uphill or uneven walks can trigger seizures or create mobility hazards.
- Riders need alternative accessible paths clearly marked.

### **Suggestion:**

Before reaching a stop, provide **advance signage** indicating:

- Bus arrival times
  - Alternative accessible stops nearby
  - Best routes for avoiding steep grades
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## 6. Overcrowding of Bus Shelters with Homeless Encampments

Families report:

- Feeling unsafe entering shelters used for extended camping or drug use.

Recommendation:

- Regularly monitor and maintain shelters.
  - Connect individuals experiencing homelessness to services without punitive approaches.
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## 7. Misconception: “People with disabilities should just use Access”

Families report that Metro often assumes:

- IDD = automatic qualification for Access
- IDD = rider should only use paratransit

This creates access barriers because:

- Many IDD youth want independence and choose to use regular transit.
  - Many do *not* qualify for Access, despite real support needs.
  - Mainstream transit must be designed to serve them.
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## 8. Environmental and Health Considerations

Clear signage and enforcement of:

- **No smoking** at transit stops  
This protects individuals with asthma, respiratory issues, sensory sensitivities, and other health vulnerabilities.
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## 9. Emergency and Elopement Response System

There is currently no clear system when a child or adult with IDD accidentally:

- Boards the wrong bus or train
- Gets lost during transit
- Elopers and ends up in a transit corridor

Recommendation:

- A **non-police emergency hotline** specifically for transit-related safety events.
  - Ability to rapidly alert transit staff across the system.
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## 10. Technology Integration Opportunities

Community members recommend:

- App or Bluetooth pairing to support language access in transit progress
- Multi-language route updates
- Spoken alerts for riders with visual disabilities
- Push notifications for delays, reroutes, or stop closures

Best Regards,

Nicole

Nicole Barker (*she/her*)



Interim Executive Director

Languages: English

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