Chapter 4

Needs, Gaps, and Duplications

Federal law requires that the Coordinated Plan identify needs and gaps in the special needs transportation network. The needs and gaps outlined below were assessed throughout the planning process through outreach to transportation providers and local mobility coalitions. In addition, subject matter experts on PSRC’s Special Needs Transportation Committee provided insight into the needs and gaps throughout the special needs transportation network. The intent was to inform the creation of strategies that will guide transportation and information service providers in overcoming these gaps. These strategies can be found in Chapter 5 of this plan — “Mobility Tomorrow.”

Needs

Transportation needs differ among special needs transportation populations – senior, youth, low-income, and individuals with a disability. At the most basic level, all residents of the central Puget Sound region need to access daily necessities without an undue financial or time burden. However, each individual’s unique transportation needs are shaped by a variety of factors, including but not limited to where they live and work, personal or cultural obligations, and medical conditions.

Through consultation with human service transportation providers and local mobility coalitions in the region, the following transportation needs have been identified for the central Puget Sound region’s special needs transportation populations:

- Safe and convenient access to appropriate transportation options.
- Affordable transportation options.
- Reliable transportation.
- Safe and secure transportation.
- Reliable public transportation outside of peak hours.
- Clear information on available transportation options.
- Convenient trip planning.
- Reasonable travel times.
- Culturally relevant information resources.
- Accessible transportation infrastructure.
- Seamless connections between transportation services.

Gaps

Gaps in the special needs transportation network have been identified as falling into one of the following five categories: spatial, temporal, institutional, infrastructure, or awareness. This section of the Coordinated Plan explains
each gap in greater detail and identifies the specific gaps in the central Puget Sound region. Each gap was either identified through outreach to local mobility coalitions or was carried over from the previous Coordinated Plan.

Spatial Gaps

Spatial gaps refer to locations that are underserved, or not served at all, by transportation services. To be cost-efficient, public transportation service is oriented towards serving the region’s urban centers and major employment centers. This type of service provision creates spatial gaps in suburban and rural locations where transit service is either unavailable or inadequate to meet the daily needs of special needs populations. For special needs transportation populations, these gaps can be especially disruptive as alternative transportation options may not be available.

SPATIAL GAPS IN THE CENTRAL PUGET SOUND

- Transit service reductions have made it increasingly difficult to connect rural clients and riders to areas well served by fixed-route transit. This problem is particularly evident in Pierce and Snohomish counties.
- Transit service to destinations outside of major activity centers is inadequate to meet the needs of special needs populations.
- Direct transit service between medical facilities in the region is lacking. This is especially problematic for patients who need to travel between multiple medical facilities in one day.
- Fixed-route transit service operates primarily on a north-south orientation. As a result, east-west travel is cumbersome for transit-dependent populations and may require multiple transfers.

Temporal Gaps

Temporal gaps are caused when transportation service is not available at times when it is needed by special needs transportation populations. With public transit’s commute-hour focus, a substantial portion of the region’s transit service does not operate early enough in the morning or late enough in the evening for low-income individuals on alternative work schedules.

TEMPORAL GAPS IN THE CENTRAL PUGET SOUND

- 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 Gaps

Institutional gaps are caused by the rules, regulations, and requirements that govern transportation service provision. Many institutional gaps go unnoticed by riders and clients, yet can inadvertently create obstacles to their mobility. Institutional gaps are not always clearly defined and can take many forms.

INSTITUTIONAL GAPS IN THE CENTRAL PUGET SOUND

- Connection with ferries is difficult for paratransit vehicles. Because they do not get priority boarding, paratransit vehicles often miss ferries during peak times, which can result in riders missing appointments. Furthermore, due to a lack of communication between transportation providers and the ferry system, coordinating docking time with a pick-up on the other end is difficult.
- Paratransit systems generally do not provide same-day service, which means riders must always plan trips in advance and cannot be spontaneous about travel.
Coordinated Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan — Puget Sound Regional Council

• Complimentary ADA paratransit service is funded locally through the transit district’s tax base. Since this service is federally mandated, without a separate funding base, ADA paratransit service both competes with funding for fixed-route service and adds to the cost of providing fixed-route service. This can result in decreased fixed-route service in order to maintain the minimum level of ADA paratransit service and discourage expansion of paratransit service beyond the minimum to comply with the ADA laws.

• **Common standards** do not exist among agencies, including but not limited to vehicle safety, driver training, and driver licensing.

• Transportation providers and brokers use **different scheduling, dispatching, and reporting software**, making information sharing difficult.

• Transportation providers do not group trips or offer **shared rides among different special needs populations**. This can result from eligibility requirements preventing shared trips, perceived increased liability, or an agency’s concern that funding will be jeopardized if they transport someone who is not their client.

• Statewide cost-sharing allocation formulas are lacking.

• Fixed-route transit service reductions are forcing individuals with special transportation needs onto higher-cost transportation services.

• **It is challenging for new projects to compete for funding.** As a result, new projects that effectively respond to recent changes in the special needs transportation landscape (e.g., transit service reductions) may not get off the ground.

• **Cross-county trips** outside the PSRC region are difficult due in part to a lack of coordination among service providers.

• **Transfer between different special needs transportation services** is cumbersome and may result in additional wait time for a customer to complete a trip.

**Infrastructure Gaps**

Infrastructure gaps are areas where a lack of physical or technological infrastructure prevents individuals from accessing needed transportation options. Infrastructure gaps can take the form of a major roadway acting as a barrier to accessing daily necessities, a lack of sidewalks adjacent to transit stops, or intersections not meeting ADA standards.

**INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS IN THE CENTRAL PUGET SOUND**

• Transit facilities and bus stops without **accessible walkways and safe crossings**.

• **Sidewalk ramps** that are not level or too steep.

• Bus stops and other transportation waiting areas lack benches.

• Bus stops lack adequate **weather protection**.

• Rural and suburban roads are unsafe for pedestrian and wheel chair users.

• Special needs populations have limited **access to new travel information resources**, including mobile and web-based applications.

• Public spaces lack amenities for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

• **Pedestrian crossing times at signalized intersections** are not long enough for seniors, children, and individuals with mobility impairments.

• Lack of affordable, accessible, or lift-equipped vehicles for people who are disabled, but who are not eligible for Medicaid or ADA paratransit services.
Awareness Gaps

Learning how to access and utilize transportation options can be a daunting task for individuals unfamiliar with all transportation programs and services available in the region. Gaps in awareness occur when individual riders and social service agencies are not fully informed on available transportation options. While awareness gaps can take many forms, they all stem from a lack of information.

AWARENESS GAPS IN THE CENTRAL PUGET SOUND

- Language and cultural barriers prevent riders and clients from accessing transportation options.
- Traveler information technologies are too advanced or are too difficult to acquire for some users.
- Social service agencies do not always have adequate information regarding available transportation choices for their clients, particularly if transportation is not offered by the social service agency. This may result in referral to less efficient transportation options than those that are actually available.
- Fixed-route transit, rideshares and vanpools are marketed to commuters and not to special needs populations. Furthermore, funding is not available to meet the demand for specialized paratransit, volunteer and other community transportation, and hence marketing is not encouraged.
- Rural communities are not aware of available transportation options due to limited funding available for marketing and coordination.
- Misinformation and unfounded fears create a negative perception of transit among older populations.
- Decision makers do not have full knowledge of where special needs populations reside in their community and may not be fully aware of their mobility needs.
- Special needs populations are not aware of all available information resources.
- Multiple efforts to provide transportation option information online.

Duplications

Demand for transportation service is increasing among special needs populations, competition is growing for limited funding opportunities, and substantial cuts to fixed-route transit service have occurred throughout the region. Each of these facts makes it increasingly difficult for special needs transportation providers to meet demand for their services. In some cases, duplicative services fill gaps where available options are inadequate to meet demand. However, there are instances where removing duplications could improve delivery of special needs transportation service. Various funding sources restrict different transportation services to specific populations for specific purposes. This results in service duplication and redundancy in multiple areas.

EXAMPLES OF DUPLICATIONS

- Vehicles from different agencies may be traveling in the same corridor at the same time, but may be offering different services or serving different populations and cannot pick up additional riders.
- Schools, transit agencies, and Medicaid brokers operating separate but similar training programs for drivers.
- Schools, transit systems, and other transportation providers having their own in-house maintenance programs for vehicles when they could take advantage of economies of scale by combining resources.
- Brokers, transit systems, senior programs, and other agencies each having their own call center for people to call to arrange for transportation instead of having a one-stop shop.
- Each transportation system has different eligibility requirements. A person who may qualify for more than one type of service may need to apply for several different programs with each having different requirements and processes.
Regional Examples of Addressing Needs and Gaps

Beyond the Borders — Pierce County

Beyond the Borders is a free transportation service provided by Pierce County Community Connections. Older adults, individuals with disabilities and people with low incomes living in rural Pierce County may be eligible for transportation from home to their destination or to the nearest bus stop and back. By providing trips to and from rural Pierce County, Beyond the Borders fills many of the spatial gaps created by transit service reductions in rural and suburban areas.

Community Travel Tips — King County

Community Travel Tips is a project of the King County Mobility Coalition, developed to raise awareness about how to use public transportation in King County, through YouTube videos and printable guides on King County’s website. Both resources are available in 13 languages to help new public transportation riders learn how to ride the bus, pay for the bus and light rail, and use other ways to travel. Community Travel Tips helps overcome gaps in awareness by providing information on using public transportation in formats that are accessible by many of the region’s LEP populations.

Transportation Assistance Program — Snohomish County

The Transportation Assistance Program (TAP) provides a special needs transportation safety net for older adults and people with disabilities outside the DART service area. TAP clients are picked up at their door and delivered to their destination, or transferred to another transportation provider – DART, Everett Paratransit, or ACCESS. By connecting people to services, health care, senior centers, shopping, recreation and more, TAP addresses spatial gaps that exist in rural areas of Snohomish County.

Life In Motion — King County

Life In Motion is a project of the King County Mobility Coalition, developed to raise awareness about transportation options in King County and to encourage people to get out and about. Life In Motion helps connect people with the most appropriate transportation option for them, whether it be fixed-route transit, demand response services, or volunteer transportation.