

MEMO

To: Transportation Funding Task Force Members

From: Tyler Frisbee, Transportation and Federal Policy Manager, Government Affairs

Re: Task Force Meeting August 21, 2019

Date: August 27, 2019

After last week's Task Force meeting, several of you asked for a more detailed written summary of the program feedback discussion and prioritization exercise. That summary is below.

Program Concept Feedback

The Task Force discussed high-level priorities and potential outcomes of regionwide funding programs at its June 19 meeting.

At the Task Force's July 24 meeting, Metro staff presented 16 possible regionwide funding program concepts. This list was developed by staff based on direction from the Metro Council, [perspectives and opinions](#) we heard during the culturally specific community engagement work conducted this spring, and [feedback](#) from several thousand people who completed an online survey this summer, as well as technical advice from Metro and other agency staff. The list was further augmented by feedback we heard from Task Force members about outcomes the potential programs should advance, as well as several specific program ideas Task Force members proposed.

On July 24, Task Force members gave feedback on these 16 possible program concepts. Some Task Force members also commented via an online form following the meeting. At the August 21 meeting, Andy Shaw and I provided a quick update on staff's response to this feedback, which is described in greater detail below.

Task Force members' program concept feedback focused on the following seven themes:

- **Supporting People Living with Disabilities:** Task Force members expressed a desire to better understand how potential programs might improve the mobility of people living with disabilities. This question is particularly salient because some programs might be focused on supporting one vulnerable group, but benefit people of many abilities and needs. For example, a crosswalk built to make it easier for children to get to school is also useful for someone using a mobility device to cross the street.

Following the Task Force's feedback, staff updated the program descriptions to better identify which would best benefit people living with disabilities. In short, staff believe the following potential programs are most likely to improve mobility for people living with disabilities: Safe Routes to Schools, Safety Hot Spots, Better Bus, and Main Streets.

- **Supporting First/Last Mile Solutions:** Task Force members wanted clarification on which programs would support first/last mile solutions. In general, any program that increases

connectivity, particularly for walking/biking and in key regional centers, supports first and last mile solutions. Following the Task Force's discussions, staff updated the program descriptions to reflect this interest.

Key programs that support first and last mile access include: Safe Routes to School, Safety Hot Spots, Smart Cities, Main Streets, Active Transportation Regional Connections, and the Equitable Transit-Oriented Development program (by providing more housing closer to transit and reducing the need for first/last mile connections).

- **Increasing Transit Ridership through Increased Transit Service Hours:** Task Force members expressed significant interest in creating a program to support increased transit service in the Metro region; this was also a theme of public comment at Task Force meetings. Such a program would primarily entail funding transit agencies to employ additional bus drivers.

Over the summer, Metro staff discussed this concept with TriMet and other agency staff. Their feedback focused on four primary areas:

- *Local transit agencies already plan to add service.* TriMet and SMART both anticipate additional service funds in the next four years. Both agencies received service funds through HB 2017. TriMet will also have the opportunity to leverage employer payroll tax increases in the next five years. The HB 2017 funds and employer payroll tax increase will result in a more than 10% service-hours increase for TriMet between now and 2024.
- *Moving buses quickly is critical to increasing ridership.* Transit agencies seek to ensure that bus routes are moving faster, and additional buses on the road are not just getting caught in the same traffic. TriMet's Strategic Plan and Metro's Climate Smart Strategy acknowledge that two things must happen in order to significantly increase transit ridership in the region: People must have better access to transit, and transit must be competitive with driving. As the speed and reliability of the bus system in our region struggles with worsening traffic, TriMet is focused on finding funding that can be used on road capital projects that will help transit move faster and be just as attractive as driving as the agency adds new service funded by HB 2017 and the employer payroll tax increase.
- *Funding sources matter.* While there is funding for increased service hours becoming available in the next five years, as well as possible opportunities for future funding, TriMet and other transit agencies currently do not have sufficient funding for capital roadway projects to help buses move faster across the region. A possible regional transportation measure is one of the best possible funding sources for some of these improvements.
- *Increased transit service hours brings additional administrative challenges.* TriMet is already struggling to hire and train new bus drivers and maintenance workers, and provide the necessary service facilities needed to house and maintain additional buses made possible by current anticipated increases in service hours funding. Including funding for hiring additional bus drivers in a regional funding measure could exacerbate these challenges.

Given the transit agencies' feedback, and the unique opportunity of the possible regional transportation measure to fund some of the needed capital projects to help buses move people more quickly around the region, Metro staff did not offer a transit service hours program for Task Force consideration.

- **Increasing Paratransit Service:** Some Task Force members asked for consideration of a paratransit service funding program to supplement TriMet's existing service. By federal law, TriMet is required to provide ADA accessible paratransit LIFT services to anyone with a qualifying disability living within three-quarters of a mile of a fixed route service such as a bus or MAX line. The LIFT service is available during the hours that fixed route service is available. TriMet must provide paratransit services to all qualifying individuals for all requested rides regardless of trip purpose or financial means. TriMet provides door to door LIFT services; however, the federal requirement is for curbside services only.

TriMet's LIFT service provides about one million trips per year at an operating cost of about \$37 million. LIFT rides cost an average of \$40 per ride. TriMet's longstanding policy has been to charge the same for LIFT as for a regular adult trip on the fixed-route system, i.e. \$2.50, though federal law allows the agency to charge up to twice a standard adult fare. Ridership through the LIFT system has been steady for the past few years, but costs have grown as the LIFT rider base has shifted from closer-in neighborhoods to outer neighborhoods, requiring longer trips and resulting in fewer "linked" trips. TriMet is required to provide LIFT services regardless of individual trip cost, trip purpose or total program cost. TriMet receives federal and state funds to help support the LIFT program; however, these funds only about 8 percent of the cost of providing LIFT service.

Many of the capital improvements that would be funded by other proposed programs for the regional measure would directly improve accessibility for people living with disabilities. Additionally, a ballot measure could only fund operational service increases for a limited time. While TriMet's LIFT program is in need of additional funding, staff were unable to develop a paratransit service program that minimized these challenges.

- **Better Bus Program:** Some Task Force members wanted clarification about the Better Bus program and its intention. The Better Bus program would fund, on an ongoing basis, targeted capital projects to help speed up buses and reduce current reliability or delay challenges. The Better Bus program would implement projects such as transit signal priority, transit only lanes, transit turn lanes, far-side boarding, level boarding, and other treatments proven to be effective at speeding up transit, at locations around the region that have been identified as the places where some of the most significant transit delay occurs. Critically, these transit capital investments would be in addition to transit capital investments on the Tier 1 corridors, bringing transit reliability improvements throughout the region.

- **Implementing a Transportation Community Policing Program:** Some Task Force members and community groups expressed an interest in developing a type of transportation community policing or community enforcement program. Policing and enforcement is a complicated issue, particularly as it interfaces with and reinforces the Portland region's history of racial injustice and inequality. Therefore, extreme sensitivity, understanding and community engagement is paramount in exploring this issue. The interest we heard from community groups demonstrates how complicated this issue is: Some are focused on increasing public safety and helping people feel protected from crime, while others are interested in reducing the uniformed police presence on our transportation system.

Metro does not have the authority to manage enforcement on any part of the transportation system. To implement any type of enforcement or policing program, Metro would have to fund other agencies and require them to follow certain procedures and policies. Given the complicated nature of enforcement, staff are not confident that we could develop a program in a way that adequately responds to the needs expressed, and that protects the rights of individuals, particularly individuals of color, using the transportation system.

- **Implementing Participatory Budgeting:** Several Task Force members asked for exploration of participatory budgeting in the regionwide programs. Participatory budgeting originated with the concept of setting aside a significant portion of a local government's budget and asking community members how they wanted that portion of the budget to be spent, with no restrictions on what agency or what general issue the funds were spent on. For example, community members might decide to spend funds on a community daycare, street beautification or extended library hours. In more recent years, participatory budgeting has come to describe greater community involvement in the design and management of government-run programs.

In this case, the original program concepts were developed from community input. Once Metro Council provides direction about which programs to advance for consideration in the measure, Metro is planning to host workshops to engage community members and technical experts in designing the programs to best address community needs.

Metro has also proposed a participatory budgeting pilot as part of the proposed 2019 Parks and Nature bond program. If the Parks and Nature bond is passed by voters, it could provide guidance as to how participatory budgeting principles can be incorporated into future ballot measures.

Task Force Exercise

Following our presentation of the above feedback and our responses on August 21, Task Force members engaged in an exercise to provide Metro Council with feedback on which of the proposed 16 program concepts they would prioritize in a regional ballot measure.

Task Force members were provided with a total of 9 dots, 5 dots to indicate a high priority program, 2 dots to indicate a medium priority program, and 2 dots to indicate a low priority program. For the purposes of this exercise, a low priority dot indicated more interest than no dot at all.

The dot exercise resulted in the following tallies for each program:

- **Safe Routes to Schools** (Average Ranking: 2.96)
 - High (23)
 - Mid (1)
 - Low (0)
- **Better Bus** (Average Ranking: 2.68)
 - High (19)
 - Mid (4)
 - Low (2)
- **Active Transportation Regional Connections** (Average Ranking: 2.52)
 - High (17)
 - Mid (4)
 - Low (4)
- **Safety Hot Spots** (Average Ranking: 2.71)
 - High (16)
 - Mid (4)
 - Low (1)
- **Fare Affordability: Students** (Average Ranking: 2.44)
 - High (11)
 - Mid (4)
 - Low (3)
- **Transit Vehicle Electrification** (Average Ranking: 2.35)
 - High (10)
 - Mid (3)
 - Low (4)
- **Protecting and Preserving Multi-Family Housing** (Average Ranking: 1.95)
 - High (8)
 - Mid (2)
 - Low (9)

- **Fare Affordability: Affordable Housing** (Average Ranking: 2.40)
 - High (7)
 - Mid (9)
 - Low (1)
- **Air Quality Monitoring** (Average Ranking: 2.33)
 - High (6)
 - Mid (0)
 - Low (3)
- **Main Streets Revitalization** (Average Ranking: 2.10)
 - High (6)
 - Mid (3)
 - Low (5)
- **Equitable Transit Oriented Development** (Average Ranking: 2.0)
 - High (6)
 - Mid (11)
 - Low (6)
- **School Bus Electrification** (Average Ranking: 2.0)
 - High (2)
 - Mid (1)
 - Low (2)
- **Smart Cities** (Average Ranking: 1.45)
 - High (1)
 - Mid (3)
 - Low (7)
- **Future Corridor Planning** (Average Ranking: 1.9)
 - High (3)
 - Mid (3)
 - Low (4)
- **Community Place-Making** (Average Ranking: 2.0)
 - High (1)
 - Mid (2)
 - Low (1)
- **Community Strengthening**
 - No rankings, just comments, listed below:
 - 1.5% as a starting point for funding
 - Must be tied to every major corridor project, as well as region-wide programs. Must be at the forefront of our process, not an afterthought.
 - This is a critical initiative within all corridor investments.

After the dot exercise, Task Force members had a chance to discuss the results as a small group while the results were tallied.

The top five scoring programs were put up on a posterboard. There was an error in that the scores for the two fare affordability programs were combined and listed just as “fare affordability,” which should have referred just to the student fare affordability program. When each program is considered individually, the top six program concepts are Safe Routes to Schools, Better Bus, Active Transportation Regional Connections, Safety Hotspots, and Fare Affordability for Students.

When asked to respond to the tallying, Task Force members generally were pleased by the results of the exercise, although many indicated that they would like to see transit vehicle electrification and either of the proposed housing program concepts as a considered program concept as well.

What Happens Next

The Metro Council will discuss the Task Force’s program concept feedback and priorities at work sessions on Sept. 3, 17 and 24. The Metro Council is expected to provide direction to staff on which programs to further develop at its Sept. 24 work session.

After Council direction, Metro plans further engagement, including community and technical forums, to develop the programs through the fall. Programs will be included in a final ballot measure package recommendation for the Task Force’s consideration in the spring.