



For Immediate Release
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Over 1,400 County Residents Weigh-In on Metro's Sustainability Fix
Respondents divided on new revenue sources, current riders willing to pay higher fares

SEATTLE – Countywide Community Forums of King County (CCF) released today survey results from the Round 8 of forums on creating long-term sustainability for Metro Transit and the county's overall budget. Called "*King County Budget: Achieving Sustainability Together*", the survey showed little consensus on how best to diversify Metro's revenue sources, although a majority of current bus riders indicated a willingness to pay higher fares.

Over 1,400 residents – a new record for the CCF program – weighed in on Metro's options to diversify revenue or cut costs while increasing performance and maintaining expected services. A full copy of the report is available at <http://communityforums.org/round8report/> or by calling toll-free at (800) 369-2584.

Survey respondents were divided over ways to reduce Metro Transit's reliance on the sales tax, with 19 percent choosing to increase bus fares, 17 percent opposing any new taxes, fees, or other revenue sources, and 12 percent favoring an increase in the percentage of existing property tax currently going to Metro Transit. Of those respondents who currently ride Metro, a majority (60%) is willing to pay more while 20 percent of respondents say that bus fares are currently too high, and 15 percent have no alternative means of transportation.

Although sixty-two percent of respondents had not taken a bus ride during the last 30 days, 68 percent viewed Metro Transit as an essential service that should be funded, at least in part, by taxpayers.

When asked to rank their top 3 choices among a set list of options to cut costs or increase performance, top picks in decreasing order of preference were; increasing the use of performance measures and outcomes; collectively bargain with the unions to reduce wages, salaries or benefits; and adopt additional new procedures that reduce fare evasion.

"These findings align with steps the County has taken to make our system more efficient and productive," said Metro General Manager Kevin Desmond. "To avoid painful system reductions we've cut costs, implemented audit recommendations, partnered with our employees for savings, and raised fares four times in the past four years – and we expect to further improve productivity through our new Transit Strategic Plan and Service Guidelines."

This is the third time CCF has tackled budget issues since the program started in 2008. Over 3,000 people have participated in a budget-related forum, or taken an online budget survey. "We're very encouraged by the outpouring of interest and seeing a record number of people participate," said John Spady, Citizen Councilor Coordinator for CCF, "It shows that people really want to have a say in how services are delivered and what the future of King County will look like."

The fall round of forums also marked the first time CCF provided a grant program for their

community partners. CCF has 38 partners including the Woodland Park Zoo, Boys & Girls Clubs of King County, and Solid Ground. For the budget round of forums, 22 organizations earned grants ranging from \$1,700 to \$100 with top grants going to Compass Housing Alliance, Mary's Place, and MLK FAME Community Center.

A full list of the CCF Partner grant recipients is available on the CCF website:
<http://communityforums.org/participate/press-releases/>

Participation in the CCF forums is open to anyone living, working, or going to school in King County. The program is overseen by the King County Auditor, is staffed by volunteers, privately underwritten and uses no taxpayer money. Over 2,000 people have registered to be, what program founders call, a *Citizen Councilor*.

Highlights from survey “King County Budget: Achieving Sustainability Together”

Forty-five percent disagreed and 38 percent agreed with the recent decision to eliminate the Metro Ride Free Zone in downtown Seattle by October 2012.

A strong plurality (46 percent) indicated support for having 21-28 percent of Metro operating costs covered by riders through fare box receipts (the current figure is 28 percent). Nineteen percent thought riders should pay a higher percentage while another 10 percent chose a percentage ranging from 0 (free fares) to 10 percent.

While 16 percent opposed any reduction in services, 25 percent of respondents preferred to “convert the lowest productivity fixed-route services to lower cost alternative services, such as vanpools, taxi-scrip or community vans” from among a list of possible additional measures to reduce expenses.

Of the sixty-eight percent of respondents who indicated that Metro Transit is an essential service that should be funded, at least in part, by taxpayers, the majority said it enhanced public mobility and therefore encourages economic activity and reduces congestion. Ten percent thought that taxpayers should only pay for service that benefit disabled, elderly and low-income people and 6 percent indicated that people who use public transportation should pay the full cost of operating the system.

In a series of questions specific to the overall King County budget, respondents were divided on what would make King County more efficient and productive. A quarter of them picked each of the proposed recommendations 1) evaluate the cost benefit of outsourcing more functions; 2) enhance the use of new technology and business practices; 3) make wider use of performance audits. The remaining 25 percent either abstained or suggested conflicting solutions, such as cutting staff and/or salaries, offering incentives for improved staff performance, and either outsourcing staff functions or bringing such functions in-house in order to reduce costs."

Respondents did not feel that the budget reserve should be adjusted in the short term. But the most respondents -- 29 percent -- supported increasing it later when we are out of the current economic slowdown and 25 percent were satisfied with the current \$15 million reserve.

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