



Transit Service is Essential

It's time the state stepped up

The pandemic has laid bare that a baseline level of transit service is a critical lifeline for people who can't drive, and is essential to keeping Washington's economy running. For the good of the economy, for the [20% of Washingtonians who do not or cannot drive](#), and the third of transit riders that are [essential workers](#), the State has an obligation to ensure a baseline level of transit service by directly funding operations.

In 2019, Washington state riders took 239.8 million trips on transit, at a cost of \$4.4 billion statewide. The state contributed less than 3% of that.

It's time for the state to put a down payment towards transit service.

We need to step up

- **We need a complete network.** Transit service is the equivalent of a modal network -- but one that has huge gaps during different times of day and to different locations. Imagine if your road disappeared during the middle of the night, or stopped 10 blocks short of your destination. An infrequent and incomplete transit network without broad coverage prevents people from getting to their destinations.
- **Direct is best.** The state provides some grants for operations, while primarily leaving local jurisdictions to request state authority to even go to the ballot, all while directly funding car networks.
- **Washingtonians take more than 200 million trips on transit each year.** In 2019, there were approximately 11 million transit service hours and 239.8 million total passenger trips in Washington state.

- **The state contributes less than 3% of the cost.** Transit's total operating revenues were \$4.4 billion in 2019. Of that, the state contributed \$118.2 million – or less than 3%.
- **Service is unequal across Washington right now. The state could fix that.** WSDOT held a series of public workshops this year. Participants' top priority? "Establish a baseline for minimum service and provide funding to ensure this level of service across the state."

Why Transit Service?

- **Access** – Twenty-five percent of Washingtonians don't have driver's licenses.
- **Affordability** – In 2016, the average cost to own a car in Washington was \$10,357/yr, not including parking. APTA states that the average household could save up to \$10,000 yearly by owning one less car and taking public transit instead.
- **Climate & Environment** – Increasing multimodal travel, and decreasing dependency on private vehicles, is a critical component to building a sustainable system.
- **Economic recovery** – Investing in transit will also spur economic recovery, with every \$1 invested worth \$3-4 in return. Historically, investments in public transportation generate 31% more jobs per dollar than new construction of roads and bridges. Research shows that the payoff was even larger in recent stimulus spending, with public transportation projects producing 70% more jobs per dollar than road projects.
- **Equity** – Transit provides essential trips and essential jobs for people of color and low-income individuals. Among urban residents, Black, Latinx, and immigrant community members are more likely to take public transit daily or weekly, compared with whites. During COVID, ridership has remained highest on routes that serve communities of color. In U.S. cities people of color account for a disproportionate share of the 2.8 million essential workers who usually commute on transit as well as frontline transit workers.

Widespread need and strong stakeholder support

- Participants in [Front & Centered listening sessions](#) across the state overwhelmingly supported efforts to reduce auto-dependence by investing in walking, biking, and transit. The lack of adequate transit frequency, or high-quality shelters or even benches at stops came up at many sessions, particularly those outside the Seattle area. In terms of service, participants prefer more all-day, weekend and evening service rather than 'office commute' hours with greater service in the peaks.
- Similar themes arose in [a more local survey of BIPOC communities in South Seattle and South King County](#), where respondents pointed out that more service is needed to provide quicker, more direct transit service that goes to more locations.