

## West Seattle September service change public feedback summary

### Outreach overview

Since launching RapidRide C Line service Sept. 29, we heard from customers that buses were overcrowded during commutes and sometimes not running on time. There are 6,120 daily boardings on the C Line. Some of these customers are tweeting, commenting on the West Seattle Blog and Seattle Times online, emailing, and calling to express their frustration. In an effort to channel this frustration in a more constructive way for customers and Metro, we invited customers to talk to us about how the service change has gone for them, begin educating them about what we are doing and can do to address concerns, and learn from them what we should do moving forward to improve our customer experience and foster credibility and trust with the public.

To this end, Metro:

- Set up online comment form Nov. 19 - Dec. 7, 2012
- Posted to the blog and Facebook, Tweeted, and sent a news release
- Emailed route subscribers of West Seattle routes with a link to online form and information about on-the-ground outreach opportunities
- Spoke directly with riders at key West Seattle locations on Nov. 27 from 6:30-8:30 a.m.

**Please note:** the numbers shared here reflect the feedback we received from those who chose to participate in providing it. We did not engage a statistically valid sample of riders in providing feedback. Metro engages in customer research on all RapidRide lines of which these activities are not a part. Learn more at: <http://metro.kingcounty.gov/am/accountability/research.html>

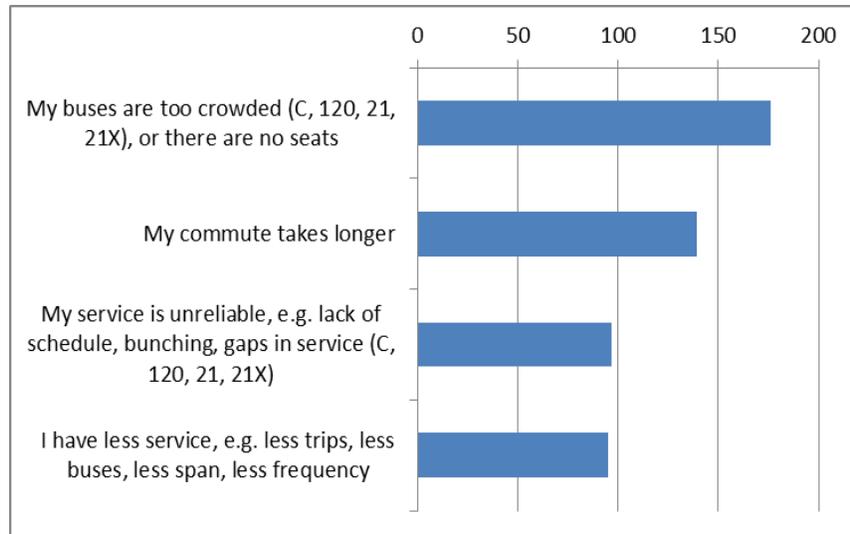
### Summary of online feedback

#### Who participated in providing feedback?

From Nov. 19 to Dec. 7, 2012, 499 people provided feedback via the online feedback form. The most commonly used bus routes they ride were the RapidRide C Line, Route 55, Route 21, and Route 50. Respondents that report riding the C Line 3 or more days per week were trying other options, such as the 55, 50, 116 or 118/119, and 21 to get to and from downtown. A majority of respondents said they were Metro customers for 5 years or longer. Ninety-nine percent of respondents said they have been riding the bus since before the September service change.

#### How have things changed for our customers who have been riding since before the September Service Change?

We asked respondents who said they were customers of Metro since before the service change how things had changed for them since Sept. 29 through Dec. 7. The following most frequently mentioned themes are summarized from 465 comments shared on this topic through Dec. 7. We heard both negative and positive feedback. First, the most common complaints:



"I'm worried during the evening commute that I won't be able to get a bus home because they [are] so crowded. I have to pick my kids up at daycare at 5 pm, so I have been leaving work early to make sure that if I do have to pass up a crowded bus, I can catch the next one and still get [to] daycare before they close."

### Buses are crowded, uncomfortable

Last fall, the most common complaint had to do with crowding on the buses. 176 people mentioned crowded buses as a common experience on the C Line and routes 21, 21X, and 120. A subset of these people were concerned about the lack of seats for disabled, injured, and the elderly. They said they or those they care about weren't routinely able to find a seat, couldn't get to one, or aren't being offered one when they

need it. Bus design issues were frequently mentioned in this category of complaint – e.g. hanging loops being unstable, too high for people of average height to reach, no place for children to grab on to something while standing, side seats that make people motion sick. Two specific concerns mentioned multiple times had to do with 1) getting on and off the bus at 2<sup>nd</sup> and Seneca – the back doors are too far from the curb making it a big step down for people, and 2) the doors being closed on people.

Metro is working to wring every minute we can out of congested commutes to make RapidRide C and D line buses run swiftly and reliably. We've added bus trips and updated schedules and driver instructions to help reduce overcrowding. On-time reliability continues to improve, and is better than the routes RapidRide replaced. [Read more...](#)

"Before there was a schedule so I knew exactly when I had to leave the house to get the bus and I never waited more than 5 minutes. Now the morning is a great guessing game: occasionally I wait moments, usually I wait 10 minutes, and I have waited as long as 20 minutes... The tag line about 'no guessing' is an absolute misnomer. All one can do now is guess. And wait.."

### Longer commute

The second most common complaint was that trips were taking longer. Nearly one-third of respondents (139) specifically mentioned that their commute took longer than before Sept. 29. Sixty-three customers wrote specifically about how they walk farther to the bus, taking two buses instead of one, or just spend more time waiting due to overcrowding or service unreliability, adding additional time to get to and from the bus and wait time to make a transfer to their trip.

### Service is unreliable, unpredictable, undependable

One-fifth of respondents (91) spoke specifically about the unreliability of service on the C Line and routes 21, 21X, and 120. Common complaints among these respondents included gaps in service, bus bunching, a lack of schedule or working “real time information signs” for the C Line, and buses passing people by because they are too full.

This was also mentioned the most among dozens of commuters we spoke with face-to-face while out in the field on Nov. 27. There was a general anxiety expressed about how hard it is to plan one’s day when riders can’t expect reliable bus service. People talked about their struggles to make it to work on time, pick up kids from daycare, or add any errands to their day when they don’t know if their commute will take 30 minutes or an hour and half.

Metro has made progress on getting real-time arrival signs working properly. We have also been coordinating with OneBusAway developers to make this well-used smart phone app work reliably for riders. Since the holidays, these systems are now working more reliably and help riders know when the next bus is coming [Read more...](#)

“My commute from North Admiral has gotten a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 25 minutes longer each way every day... I have to transfer at the junction with a 10 to 15 minute wait and board the c line to downtown. The connections... are not good or convenient, [esp.] the connections between the 128 and the 56/57...”

transfers to get downtown, and loss of span (either during the day, on weekends, or after 7 pm) due to changes to routes 37, 56, 57, 22, 125 and other deleted routes. They were the most likely to feel misled by Metro’s marketing messages that they are getting an investment or improvements in service when they perceive changes to their service as a loss of service.

### Fewer options: span, frequency, coverage

The final most common concern relates to what people perceive as reductions in service to their neighborhoods. Another one-fifth of respondents (95) talked about how service changes made taking the bus more difficult for them. Respondents in this category of complaint were from neighborhoods like the Admiral district, Alki, Arbor Heights, Genessee Hill, and White Center. They felt frustrated with fewer choices,

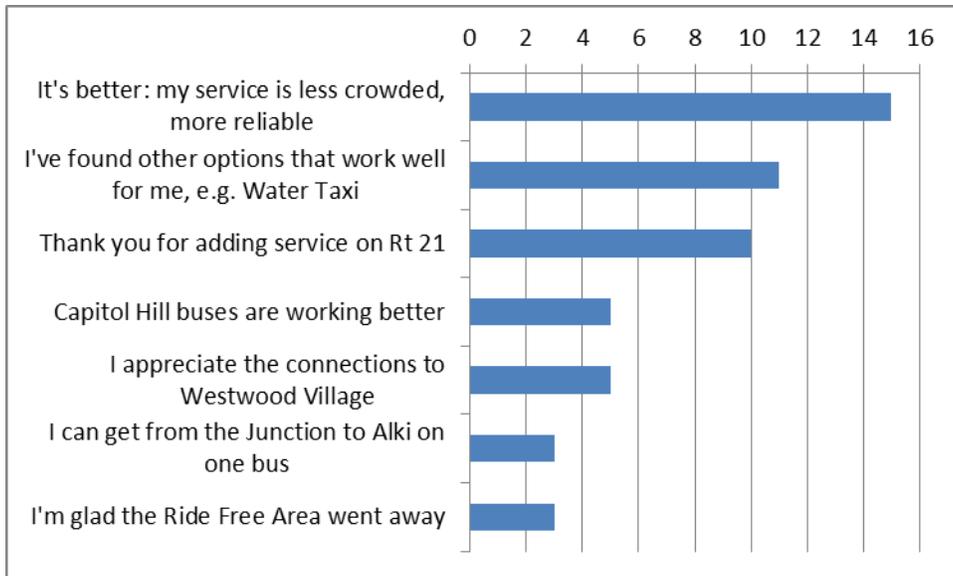
In the face of tight budgets, Metro had to rearrange bus service to serve more riders. That meant reducing service in some places while adding it in others to create new and better connections. The good news: we are serving more riders. Ridership between West Seattle and downtown Seattle grew by hundreds of riders after the September service change, while the number of weekday peak-period trips we offer (77-78) stayed the same.

“I’m very happy with the C Line especially when I need to get downtown fast so I get off my 21 and wait for the C which to me, never takes that long. I’m also very happy with bus no. 21 coming every 15 minutes and also going all the way to Westwood Village where I can go shopping.”

Now, the positive...

### Praise for better connections, service

It wasn’t all bad... Almost a fifth of respondents (86) noted things they liked about the service change. This total includes comments that were generic in their noting of improvements. Specific things identified in the remaining comments are shown in the following chart:



**What are our customers' expectations, are we meeting them?**

For about half of the 465 who responded, the answer is, "Sometimes." We asked people to tell us what their top three expectations for their bus service are, then to report on how frequently they had experienced these expectations being met in the last two weeks (through Dec. 7, 2012).

<i>Expectations in rank order</i>	<i>How often in the past 2 weeks have you experienced...</i>			
	<u>Often</u>	<u>Usually</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Never</u>
1. The bus showing up at your stop on time	10%	28%	49%	13%
2. Frequent service	7%	29%	51%	13%
3. The bus arriving at your destination on time	9%	25%	53%	13%
4. Being able to sit	9%	24%	52%	15%
5. Getting somewhere without having to transfer	18%	17%	26%	39%
6. Feeling safe	30%	31%	33%	6%
7. All the features of RR working properly	3%	15%	51%	31%
8. Paying a reasonable fare	42%	36%	14%	8%
9. Friendly and knowledgeable driver	4%	48%	39%	9%
10. A clean bus	28%	50%	17%	6%
11. Quick and easy fare payment	40%	40%	20%	0%

**What we've done, have our customers noticed?**

We asked respondents whether they had noticed a change through the end of November after Metro added bus trips on the C Line, Route 55, and Route 120 to address overcrowding and schedule problems during the morning and evening peak commute times. Four-hundred sixty-eight respondents answered this question. Three out of 10 respondents said service had improved, four out of 10 respondents said service was the same, one out of 10 respondents said service was worse, and two out of 10 respondents don't know.

In the months since we asked for feedback, on-time reliability has continued to improve and tech systems are working to better inform riders when the next bus is coming.

**Where do we go from here?**

We asked people who responded that service is the same or worsened since we have added service to bus routes what they would like us to focus on moving forward. 220 people responded.

## What one thing should we focus our energies on moving forward?

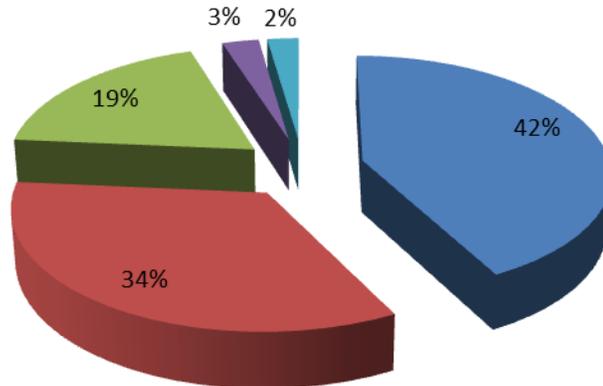
■ 42% - Provide relief for overcrowding

■ 34% - Make the schedule more reliable

■ 19% - Get more and sustainable funding to expand or increase service

■ 3% - Complete installation of RapidRide facilities and features

■ 2% - Communicate with riders



We also asked respondents who are not feeling confident in Metro what we could do to increase customer confidence that Metro is providing the best service it can with the resources it has. These comments from our customers with the most concern, plus other open-ended comments in the feedback form, provide the basis for the following themes.

"If you install something, make sure it works. If you advertise something, make sure it's accurate. Your bus signs suggest that it's so easy there will be no confusion. RapidRide is nothing but confusion. Get us the ability to know when the next bus is coming so we can plan our day... A 10 minute change in a bus coming or going can result in the whole family having to get up and out 45 minutes earlier than needed, all because we can't tell if we need to be at the stop at 7:53 or 7:55."

general sense of the schedule (i.e. bus comes every 10 minutes from the top of the hour), would alleviate the guesswork and help people plan their schedules without the uncertainty of trip length they experience today.

### Do what you promised and don't make these same mistakes in the future: get things working properly, give us a schedule

The most common wish was for Metro to provide promised service. One subset of this group wants us to give them what we marketed to them. Another subset of this group is those who would like Metro to implement things better in the future and learn from this experience. All of these respondents just want to know when a bus is supposed to come. Having the "real time information signs" work properly, a working connection with One Bus Away, and/or having a

Metro really appreciates this feedback from riders, and behind the scenes worked hard to improve tech systems that report bus arrival times. Metro will have a printed schedule in February for most of the RapidRide service. We want to more clearly communicate what riders can expect when we make changes so we all are better prepared and knowledgeable.

"The C... line was supposed to decrease morning commute times by a negligible amount... something like two minutes each way. For this streets were repainted with bus only lanes... new shelters with tote boards that don't always work [were installed]... Don't you think the money spent on these 'improvements' would have been [better] used to fund existing bus service?"

### **Stop wasting money: prioritize improving existing service over fancy buses, new stops**

The second most common refrain was the perception that Metro spent a lot of money and got worse service in return. For them, there is confusion when they hear that Metro is suffering from a loss of local operating revenue while seeing a big investment in RapidRide facilities using federal capital grant dollars.

Making capital improvements is essential to improving transit service that shares the road with general traffic. Our transit operations continue to improve, but we know we have more work to do.

### **Be transparent and honest – in data, planning, funding; don't over-promise and under-deliver**

The third largest category of responses has to do with Metro being transparent and honest with the public. Respondents said they want to see the data, understand how this was planned, and how Metro is in the financial situation it is. This group includes respondents who specifically mention feeling "oversold" on the changes.

### **Return what we had, or add service**

The final major group of responses had to do with wanting back what people had before and ideas for added service. These comments include those that can be characterized as customers who feel like the service they had before Sept. 29 worked fine and wonder why Metro "fixed something that wasn't broken." They are customers for whom the changes have meant less service because Metro canceled some routes with low ridership, or due to things like unreliability, crowding, and increased commute times because they have to walk farther or transfer. This category also includes new ideas for service that represent contradicting desires, i.e. those who want better local service and connections all-day vs. those who want more one-seat options for getting directly to downtown from their neighborhood.

Metro undertook a massive unprecedented service change in September, and some riders are not happy with the changes. We planned this change to create a system that will work better for more people – making more productive use of the limited resources we have. We expect to serve more riders – and work to find alternative service for those inconvenienced by the changes.

As transit demand continues to grow, we will work to find ways to improve transit service and balance the needs and concerns of our customers to the best of our abilities. We are keeping an eye toward sustainable funding to provide service to meet growing demand today and in the future.

"...It's good to see buses so full. Keep up the good work."

### **Miscellaneous suggestions**

Throughout the open-ended responses there were several solutions mentioned multiple times. They are not mentioned in great enough numbers to show up in this top line summary, however seem important to note. They are:

- Explore and make adjustments to how the schedules line up between connecting routes, e.g. C Line and Routes 50 and 128. Several people talked about how they have experienced these buses leaving early from the Junction stops and not waiting for C Line folks to get off the bus and transfer.
- Split the C and D Lines to improve reliability.

- Keep working to create dedicated bus lanes from West Seattle into downtown.
- Improve driver training and practice in things like fare payment, which doors to open/when, and pulling into the stop at 2<sup>nd</sup> and Seneca (several people talked about the distance to the curb from the back doors being too far and feeling unsafe).
- As we plan future work in the area, consider adding a C Line stop at the Spokane Street Park and Ride or extending the C Line to White Center.

## Next steps

This feedback will shape how we can better serve and communicate with all transit customers. 306 people provided their email address in the online form with the expectation that we will email them back directly to keep the conversation going. We will continue to post blogs that let people know what we heard, what we can/can't do, and help educate customers about the future agency plans. Each post will be accompanied by tweets to media, emails to those who gave them their email address in this feedback form, and possible invitations to future engagement activities.

This feedback will also help shape future implementation of service changes and future communications efforts about Metro's long-term work to secure more sustainable funding.