Seattle Department of Transportation

RIDE NOW

Lessons Learned from Pilot Implementation

Seattle
Department of
Transportation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) received a grant application from the Transit Planning 4 All program to inclusively plan and implement a mobility on demand solution with and for older adults and people with disabilities. This document summarizes our approach and lessons learned **piloting Ride Now, the mobility on demand solution**. For more information on our planning and engagement activities, check out our Ride Now webpage and our summary on the Ride Now inclusive planning process.

OUR APPROACH

- On-demand ride voucher program for older adults and people with disabilities

- Meant to offer a convenient, accessible, and affordable mobility option for people with limited mobility

- Multi-provider: Yellow Cab (paper vouchers) and Uber and Lyft (digital vouchers)

- Riders received between $20 and $120 in vouchers per month for use on short trips (up to 3 miles) starting or ending in Seattle

SUCCESSES

- High demand, high use, high impact

- Ease of access: Low-barrier sign-up, accessible vehicles, multiple options for booking a ride, accessible in multiple languages, and flexible use case

- Timeliness: Most rides arrived within 20 minutes

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

- Short-term and small-scale pilot
- Language access barriers with phone-based dispatch and drivers
- Driver acceptance of paper vouchers

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There is significant demand and need for low-barrier, **point-to-point** transportation options for older adults and people with disabilities, and public transportation providers should explore opportunities to develop these transportation options.

  - These options should be **low-barrier** (limited eligibility verification), **accessible** (physically accessible vehicles, offer multiple methods for booking and paying for rides, and accessible in a variety of languages), and **affordable or free**.

  - Significant staff resources may be needed to establish and manage these options, and further analysis of costs and benefits may be a helpful intermediary step.

- On-demand ride voucher programs offer people with limited mobility a way to supplement or complement their use of public transit.

- Using multiple providers gives riders options and meets more needs than using one provider alone, but opportunities remain to streamline program administration and payment across providers.

- Language access remains a critical need for on-demand transportation services, especially those offered by private providers.

PILOT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The SDOT project team began the Ride Now pilot with initial goals and objectives, but as part of the inclusive planning process, the team deliberately intended for the goals and objectives to change, developing potential solutions through a broad and intentional stakeholder engagement process rather than starting with specific solutions in mind.

Below are the initial definitions, goals, and objectives, and how they changed as the steering committee took increasing levels of ownership of the project.

	Initial ideas/language used by SDOT	Changes in response to steering committee engagement
Definition of "mobility on demand"	"Mobility on demand is a multimodal, integrated, automated, accessible, connected, innovative, user-focused approach that leverages emerging mobility services, integrated transit networks and operations, real-time data, connected travelers, and cooperative intelligent transportation systems to allow for a more traveler-centric, transportation system-of systems approach. This provides improved mobility options to all travelers and users of the system in an efficient and safe manner." (USDOT definition)	Flexible, simple, everyone, safe, ease of access, timely, dignified, equitable, humane, versatility "An innovative way to connect people with where they want to go, when they want to be there"
Project name	Inclusive Mobility on Demand – A Ride to Transit	Ride Now
Goal	Identify or develop a convenient, low-barrier mobility on demand solution that connects seniors and people with disabilities to Seattle's mass transit system.	Provide short rides to any destination for older adults and people with disabilities that is inclusive of but not limited to transit hubs.

	Initial ideas/language used by SDOT	Changes in response to steering committee engagement
Objectives	*"Convenient"*: • **Timely:** Riders will be able to request a ride when they are ready to go and can expect it to come within 15 minutes *"Low-barrier"*: • **Ease of access:** Riders will be able to request a ride through a phone call, from a computer, or via a mobile app. • **Language access:** Riders will be able to request a ride in their preferred language. • **Responsive:** Riders will be able to specify what type of access they need to enter the vehicle (e.g., wheelchair accessible or not) and get the quickest/earliest ride available that meets their access needs. • **Affordable:** Covered in the cost of transit fare, or no more expensive than transit.	• **Timely:** Riders can expect their ride to arrive within 10-20 minutes. • **Affordable:** No more expensive than transit. • **Ease of access:** Includes accessible vehicles, multiple ways to request a ride, and language access. • **Safety/rider experience:** Riders feel safe and dignified using this option, don't feel like they have to choose between safety and affordability; drivers are appropriately trained.
Problems we're trying to solve	**Barriers to accessing transit:** Older adults and people with disabilities may be able to use the mass transit system, but experience barriers in accessing it due to incomplete or blocked pedestrian infrastructure, infrequent bus feeder service, or poor infrastructure for waiting for the bus – all of which are made more complicated by terrain (hills), poor weather, dark winters, and construction. **Gaps in existing mobility options:** Access paratransit offers an alternative to some, but there are many barriers to demonstrating eligibility and riders must request rides at least 24 hours in advance.	**Getting to/from transit isn't a complete solution**, especially with the light rail system experiencing significant elevator and escalator outages during the pilot and given that transit doesn't go everywhere people need to go. *"My sister's house is a mile away, but it's not on any transit lines. A ride to transit doesn't make it any easier for me to get there."* – Steering committee member **Need for dignity:** Older adults and people with disabilities need and deserve convenient options as much as younger and able-bodied people. In addition to the eligibility and convenience barriers with using Access paratransit, there are stigmas associated with using paratransit and some people just want to blend in.

WHAT WE DID

Following a one-year planning process with the project steering committee, we launched a pilot providing vouchers for on-demand rides from existing providers already operating in the Seattle area. Details of the pilot design are below. For more information on the inclusive planning process that informed the pilot design, please refer to our companion summary.
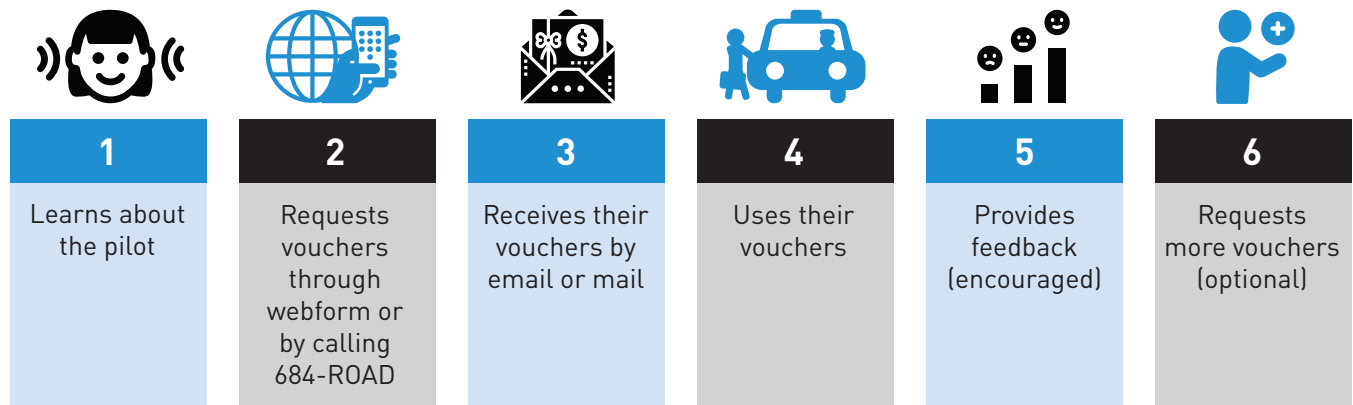
PILOT DESIGN OVERVIEW

Title: Ride Now

Tagline: "Get an accessible, affordable ride when you want it, no reservations required."

Eligibility:
- Adults age 65 and older
- People with disabilities
- Caregivers who travel with or book transportation on behalf of eligible riders

Ride Now
1. Book a ride.
2. Ride arrives in a timely manner.
3. Drop off at nearest transit station or other nearby destination and apply voucher to receive $20 off your ride.
4. Provide feedback (optional).

Seattle Department of Transportation

Description and purpose: On-demand ride voucher program for older adults and people with disabilities, to fill mobility gaps and expand mobility options for those with limited mobility.

Riders requested vouchers directly from SDOT or received them from Community Liaisons, partner organizations, and steering committee members. Riders received between $20 and $120 in vouchers per month (one provider at a time) depending on supply and need.

Pilot term: March – June 2022

A potential rider...

1	2	3	4	5	6
Learns about the pilot	Requests vouchers through webform or by calling 684-ROAD	Receives their vouchers by email or mail	Uses their vouchers	Provides feedback (encouraged)	Requests more vouchers (optional)

HOW RIDERS REQUESTED VOUCHERS

Key features and explanations:

Feature	Reasoning
Multi-provider solution (Yellow Cab, Uber, and Lyft)	No one provider met all the needs identified by steering committee, but combined they came close (check out "Service Parameters" in our Request for Quotes and "Service parameters and provider capabilities" below)
Used providers already operating in the region	Presumed more cost-effective and timely than bringing in a single new provider to deliver exclusively this service
Mix of paper and digital vouchers (Paper vouchers through Yellow Cab and digital vouchers through Uber or Lyft)	Requested by potential riders in stakeholder survey conducted fall 2021. • 48% of respondents preferred a digital voucher • 62% of respondents preferred a paper voucher *(Participants could select more than one option, so percentages total to more than 100%.)*
No eligibility verification (riders self-identify as eligible)	Low-barrier, dignified way of accessing a benefit – very important to steering committee
No income restriction	Low-barrier, didn't leave out middle-income participants who make just too much to qualify for low-income benefits but not enough to live comfortably in Seattle. (Assumed people who didn't need vouchers wouldn't bother going through the trouble of obtaining them.)
No restrictions on trip type or destination beyond Seattle start/end	Flexible use cases – very important to steering committee: • Older adults and people with disabilities are used to transportation planners only accounting for needs (e.g., doctor, grocery store), not wants (e.g., baseball game, friend's house). • Transit doesn't go everywhere riders want to go (e.g., sister's house one mile away but not on any transit lines). • Significant need for point-to-point transportation.
Requirement that trips start or end in Seattle	Project administered by Seattle Department of Transportation – desire to maintain a Seattle connection. Note that there was participant desire for trips occurring outside of Seattle.
Vouchers expired at end of each month	To limit the number of vouchers that could be pending (distributed but not yet used) at any given time

Provider	Yellow Cab	Uber and Lyft
Type of voucher	Paper	Digital
How we distributed vouchers	By hand or mail	By email or text message
Value	$10	$20
Number of vouchers rider could use per ride	Unlimited – Riders could stack vouchers and use multiple per ride	One – Riders could receive up to $20 off per ride
Number of vouchers riders received per month	2 – 12 ($20 – $120 value total)	1 – 6 ($20 – $120 value total)

SERVICE PARAMETERS AND PROVIDER CAPABILITIES

Below is a checklist of how the selected service providers meet certain needs, demonstrating that no one provider met enough needs to be the only provider in the pilot.

For more detail about the mobility and technology needs identified by the steering committee and the stakeholder survey we conducted in fall 2021, and how those needs informed the service parameters we communicated to potential providers, refer to our Request for Quotes.

Capabilities	Yellow Cab	Uber	Lyft
1. Booking a ride			
Smartphone app	✓ -	✓	✓
Webpage / online booking platform	✓ - With account	✓	✓
Phone dispatch	✓	X (Uber Central and GoGo Grandparent were cost-prohibitive for this project)	X (Lyft Concierge was cost-prohibitive for this project)
Supported languages	X English only	✓ English, Chinese, Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali, Amharic, and Korean (Tigrinya and Oromo in beta), plus in-app message translation through Google Translate	✓ - English, Spanish, French, Portuguese
2. Vehicle type			
Wheelchair-accessible vehicles (WAVs) on platform	✓	X	X
3. Voucher type			
Paper	✓	X	X
Digital	X	✓	✓
4. Payment options (for remaining fare)			
Credit/debit card	✓	✓	✓
Cash	✓	X	X
5. Parameters and program administration			
Geofencing	X	✓	✓
Day-of-request voucher distribution	X	✓	✓
Automatic renewal at beginning of month	X	✓	✓
Purchase structure	✓ - SDOT only paid for vouchers used, less 20% administrative fee on unused vouchers, but paid full value up-front	✓ SDOT only paid for vouchers used	✓ SDOT only paid for vouchers used

PILOT TIMELINE

The Ride Now pilot was live for three and a half months, from mid-March to the end of June 2022. We originally intended to launch the pilot in the fall or winter, to give riders a helpful alternative during the cold, wet, and dark winter months, and we intended for the pilot to be live for closer to six months. However, we were delayed in multiple aspects of finalizing the pilot design. Due to the grant funding timeline, we had limited ability to extend the end of the pilot, so we ended up launching later and having a shorter pilot than we originally envisioned.

Also, due to City of Seattle direct purchasing limits, we were limited to spending $58,000 of our project budget on ride vouchers, across the three providers. Though we had agreed with the providers to only pay for the vouchers that riders actually used, we had to be careful to not distribute so many vouchers that we would exceed our $58,000 cap. When we publicly launched the pilot and experienced greater demand than we had anticipated, we reduced the number of vouchers we gave each rider so that we could fulfill all the requests without exceeding our cap.

Below is a timeline of the pilot phases, including key activities and the approximate voucher value per rider in that phase.

Month	Mid-March to mid-April	Mid-April to end of May	June
Phase	**Soft launch**	**Public launch**	**Extension**
Activity	• SDOT tests paper and digital vouchers with steering committee members • Additional Yellow Cab voucher distribution through Community Liaisons and partner organizations ("warm handoff")	Riders request vouchers directly from SDOT; SDOT distributes vouchers directly to riders via mail, email, and text message • Limited additional distribution of Yellow Cab vouchers via Community Liaisons • Demand exceeds supply, SDOT begins reducing number of vouchers per rider	• SDOT extends pilot from May 31 to June 30 to redistribute unused vouchers and give more time to fulfill outstanding requests - Request form kept open until June 3 • SDOT distributes remaining Yellow Cab vouchers to Community Liaisons and partner organizations to distribute to riders • SDOT distributes additional digital vouchers (Uber/Lyft) to most who request more
Total value of vouchers distributed per rider	$120	$20-$120	$40-80

WHAT WE LEARNED

Below are highlights from our 3.5-month Ride Now pilot implementation. Data sources include:
- Voucher request and distribution data maintained by SDOT
- Voucher use and trip data from providers (Yellow Cab, Uber, and Lyft)
- Rider feedback provided by email, phone call, and through rider feedback survey

Measure	Targets and expectations	Pilot performance
Number of people requesting vouchers	About 250-500	Nearly 1,000 (imprecise due to duplicates)
Number of vouchers distributed	About 5,800	6,722
Number of voucher recipients	About 300-1,000	Over 1,000*
Number of trips taken	About 2,000	1,436
Percentage of participants that use vouchers	At least 50%	58%
Timeliness: Median wait time	Under 20 minutes	10 minutes
Affordability: Average cost to rider	Under $2.75	$4.61
Cost to SDOT (average, per trip)	$20/trip	$23/trip
Ease of access: Percentage of riders able to request and book ride through preferred mode (smartphone app, webpage, or phone call)	At least 90%	95%
Ease of access: Percentage of riders able to request rides in their preferred language	At least 90%	92% of riders were able to request ride in preferred language 88% of riders were able to communicate effectively with their driver
Safety/rider experience: Overall rider satisfaction	4 out of 5 stars	4.1 out of 5 stars

The number of voucher recipients is higher than the number of people requesting vouchers because many participants received vouchers via Community Liaisons or partner organizations, without going through our request form.

For more pilot delivery data, check out "Pilot Delivery Quick Facts" near the end of this summary.

SUCCESSES

- **High demand:** Close to 1,000 riders requested vouchers through our online request form, far exceeding our expectation to receive a few hundred requests. Community Liaisons and partner organizations also distributed vouchers to participants directly, without going through our request form.

  - **In total, we distributed over 6,700 vouchers to about 1,000 participants**

    › Yellow Cab: 5,000 $10 vouchers to about 700 participants

    › Uber: 1,184 $20 vouchers to 218 participants

    › Lyft: 538 $20 vouchers to 133 participants

- **High use:** With any new program, we expect some people to sign up for or request a benefit but never use it. We set an ambitious target of 50% of voucher recipients using at least one voucher, and we met that target.

  - **Overall, about 58% of participants used at least one voucher**

    › Yellow Cab: 400+ participants (~58%) used at least one voucher

    › Uber: 106 participants (49%) used at least one voucher

    › Lyft: 92 participants (69%) used at least one voucher

- **High impact:** Many riders shared that the Ride Now vouchers had a significant positive impact on their quality of life, saving them time, money, and effort, and allowing them to get around in ways they aren't typically able to.

"This program is necessary, useful, and transformative. I am a senior of limited means and having such good access to necessary transportation resources was so wonderful."

"I felt empowered to make more trips. I did not avoid necessary tasks due to transportation costs."

"This made huge positive impact in my life."

"These vouchers had a great impact on the quality of my life. I walk because it is cheap and healthy but I do not walk or use public transportation at night or dusk because many women like me in my residence have been mugged and injured in criminal attacks. This was a safe way to visit family in the evening like my first grandchild at 80 years."

"Having the opportunity to use Ride Now Uber vouchers was like having a huge weight lifted off of my shoulders."

"These vouchers saved my life! What a freeing program! I got to appointments I would have missed entirely, because there was a problem with the bus. I got to enjoy my life and see friends I wouldn't otherwise. I got nutritious food on days when walking or transit to the grocery store felt just too much. As someone with a disability and chronic pain I was elated to have this help!!"

"This was a rare and wonderful treat."

"I've only ever used it for places I want to go but are too close for transit. It was a legitimately great service."

"These vouchers really help me as someone who falls through some cracks in disability services."

"Ride Now vouchers are very needed for older adults. Please make Ride Now a permanent service! Thank you!"

"I'm low income disabled. I only have the smallest SSI check to live on, so spending money on Uber rides is cost prohibitive. I'm stuck at home usually because it's too much walking to use regular transit. I need door to door transportation. These were perfect for my transportation needs. I cried, thankful."

- **Ease of access (low-barrier):** It was very important to the steering committee that we trust participants to self-identify as eligible for the program and not require additional forms of proof. In the request form, we asked participants to tell us how they were eligible, but we didn't verify or make them prove their eligibility. We did not experience any apparent fraud or misuse, and participants appreciated the low-barrier means of accessing the pilot.

"It takes a lot of time to get an RRFP card. It took me about a month to go see my doctor, get a signature from them, and then go to the card office in person."
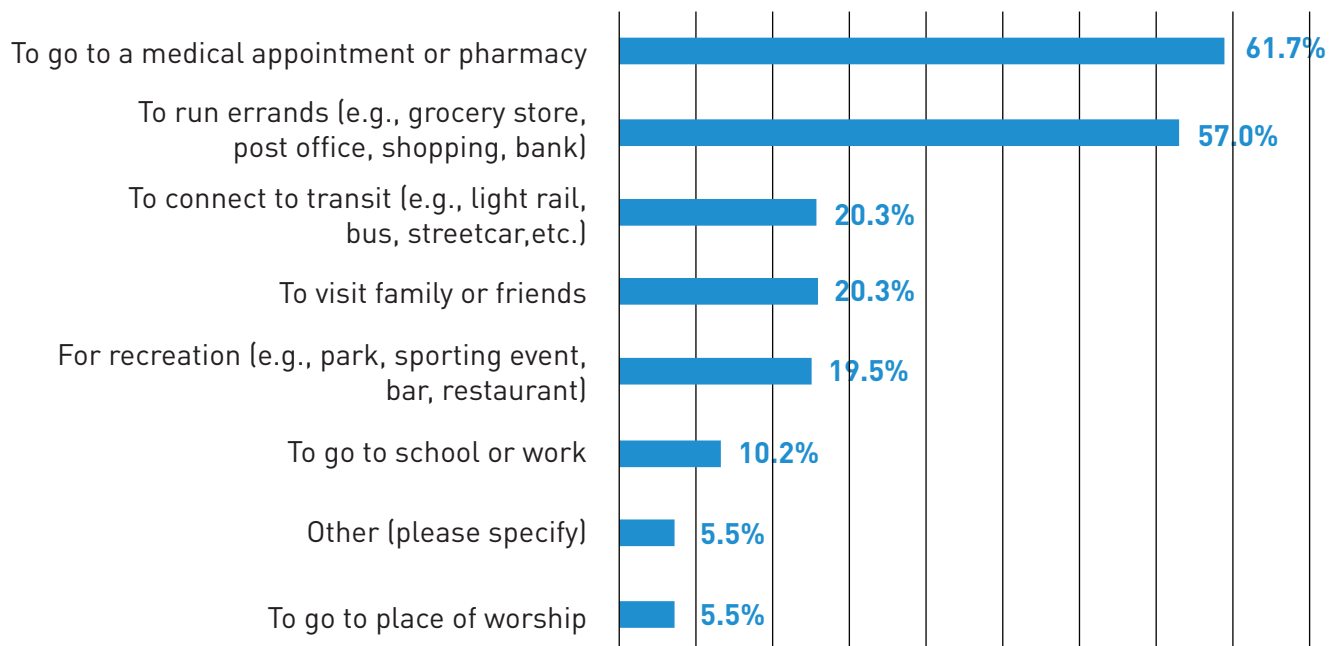– Steering committee member

Additional indicators for ease of access (estimated from rider feedback survey):

- 95% of riders were able to request ride through preferred method (e.g., mobile app, webpage, phone call)

- 92% of riders were able to request ride in preferred language

- 88% of riders were able to communicate effectively with driver

- **Timeliness:** Most rides arrived within 20 minutes, and 90% of riders reported being satisfied with the amount of time it took for their ride to arrive.

- **Flexible use case:** We placed no restrictions on trip purpose, location (except trips had to start or end in Seattle), day of week, or time of day. This allowed people to go not only where they needed to go, but also where they wanted to go.

- We originally planned for vouchers to work only on trips starting or ending at transit stations, but we expanded the pilot design to allow riders to use vouchers for any trip starting or ending in Seattle when our participant engagement indicated a need for greater flexibility.

What kind of trip(s) did you take with your vouchers?

Trip purpose	Percentage
To go to a medical appointment or pharmacy	61.7%
To run errands (e.g., grocery store, post office, shopping, bank)	57.0%
To connect to transit (e.g., light rail, bus, streetcar, etc.)	20.3%
To visit family or friends	20.3%
For recreation (e.g., park, sporting event, bar, restaurant)	19.5%
To go to school or work	10.2%
Other (please specify)	5.5%
To go to place of worship	5.5%

COMMON TRIP PURPOSES SELF-REPORTED BY RIDERS IN THE RIDER FEEDBACK SURVEY

- Partner organizations also recommended piloting this model since it was a missing service in the region (for example, in other on-demand transit connection pilots such as Ride2 and Via to Transit, some riders would take a ride to their nearest transit hub and then take another ride from the transit hub to their actual destination).

"Transportation planners seem to think older and disabled people only ever need to get to the doctor, the grocery store, or church. I want this program to allow us to go wherever we want, just like anyone else."
      – Steering committee member

CHALLENGES
Pilot design challenges

- **Seattle only:** The requirement that trips needed to start or end in Seattle presented a barrier to some potential participants in King and Snohomish counties who wanted the flexibility to use these ride vouchers in their area.

  - As Ride Now was a pilot program by the Seattle Department of Transportation, we needed to retain some anchor to the Seattle city limits, but there is clear demand for this type of flexible, on-demand ride voucher program outside of Seattle as well.

"I didn't get to use my voucher [because] I'm in the Tukwila area not Seattle."
      – Participant

"I haven't used my Lyft ride vouchers more because I'm not in the required city coverage limit. If it [covered] all King County cities then it would be more appreciated."
      – Participant

- **No required transit connection:** We did not have capacity to test a transit connection voucher concept, where riders would receive additional vouchers if they used their vouchers to connect to transit. While not requested by riders, a mobility option connecting to transit (i.e., first-/last-mile connection) is usually preferred by public transportation agencies. For more information on how this transit connection voucher could have worked, refer to the Recommendations section.

Pilot administration challenges

- **Slow processing times due to limited staff capacity:** At one point, we were several weeks behind in processing new requests. Paper vouchers required additional processing, resulting in long delays for some Yellow Cab voucher recipients. Digital vouchers could be provided the same day as the request, so once we caught up, it was easier to be responsive to time-sensitive requests.

"The program was great once set up. I gave all information requested yet it took almost a month to get set up. Thank you for trying but SET UP NEEDS WORK."
      – Participant

- **Short-term and small-scale:** The limited duration of the pilot (3.5 months) resulted in less awareness and familiarity than we likely would have observed with a longer pilot. And the $58,000 limit on ride vouchers required us to reduce the voucher value per participant when we experienced greater demand than we had anticipated. Ultimately, since we only paid for vouchers used, we ended up having budget remaining. We increased the voucher value per participant in a one-month pilot extension into June, but after distributing close to $85,000 worth of vouchers, riders only spent about $34,000. With a longer pilot timeline, we could have offered participants more vouchers and spent closer to our limit.

"The vouchers came a little too late for me to use them, sadly they came only days before the program was to expire not giving me enough time to plan and use them."
                                    – Participant

Provider services and pilot delivery challenges

- **Safety/rider experience:** Some Yellow Cab drivers refused to accept vouchers. Some drivers wouldn't accept any vouchers, but more commonly, drivers wouldn't accept more than one voucher per ride, though they were supposed to. Some riders reported very negative experiences (e.g., needing to pay out of pocket, feeling belittled or scared for their safety, etc.). We estimate about two dozen people experienced their Yellow Cab driver refusing to accept their vouchers, and more than that experienced skepticism or resistance from their driver.

  - Yellow Cab regularly communicated the program details and expectations with the drivers, but we believe the short pilot window wasn't long enough to achieve full driver awareness and acceptance.

  - SDOT eventually developed a driver-facing postcard explaining the program and how it works, asking drivers to call dispatch with questions instead of questioning riders. We distributed this to Community Liaisons and partner organizations to give to riders along with vouchers, but not until more than halfway through the pilot.

"They came quickly, but at the end of the ride they really, really didn't want to accept the vouchers, but also didn't want to call dispatch to confirm they were real. Finally, they accepted them with me sharing all of my personal info so they could contact me if something went wrong. I had to be very, very insistent to get them to accept them."
                                    – Participant

- **Ease of access (language access):** The three providers offered different levels of language access. Uber supports most Seattle Tier 1 languages through its app, Lyft supports some languages through its app, and Yellow Cab is only available in English. Participants with Yellow Cab vouchers who primarily communicate in languages other than English reported significant difficulty requesting rides and using their vouchers.

- **Timeliness:** Some driver no-shows or long wait times were reported by riders about each provider—Yellow Cab, Uber, and Lyft. Riders reported needing to cancel their request and make a new one, or just waiting a long time for their ride to arrive. Long delays occurred infrequently but impacted those who experienced them.

- **Uber vouchers didn't work on pre-scheduled rides.** One rider tried to use their vouchers to book a pre-scheduled ride but found that they didn't apply. We figured out this limitation, but only after a significant amount of confusion and frustration.

"I would have given an Excellent rating, but there was a major flaw on the Uber app that didn't make sense. It would not apply these vouchers to a reserved pick-up time, only the "Ride Now" type of ride. So if I needed a ride at a specific time, I just had to hope there was a driver nearby, no guarantee there would be."
— Participant

- **Both Uber and Lyft prefer to receive participant phone numbers instead of emails for voucher distribution.** Our request form allowed participants to share their email or phone number, and some people had issues accessing their vouchers if their email wasn't already associated with an account or was associated with a different account than the one they were trying to use.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **There is significant demand and need for point-to-point transportation for people with limited mobility.** The high demand for and high use of ride vouchers, along with feedback from riders, demonstrate a significant need for accessible, affordable point-to-point mobility options for people with limited mobility such as older adults and people with disabilities. Transit does not go everywhere that people need or want to go, and while taking transit for most of a trip is a viable option for many young, able-bodied people, getting to and from transit and using transit can be very difficult for people with limited mobility.

"It only took a few minutes to get to my Dr appointments instead of taking about an hour on the bus or walking 25min to get there. I have knee & hip issues & walking is not always an option."
— Participant

- **Riders prefer as much flexibility as possible.** For digital voucher programs, a "wallet" or "credit" model (for example, riders receive $60 per month to use on as many trips as they want) would have been more flexible than a "voucher," "pass," or "per-ride" model (for example, riders receive two vouchers per month, each offering up to $20 off per ride). Some Uber and Lyft riders were disappointed that they couldn't keep any unused value, and others tried to plan trips that would cost as close to $20 as possible so as to maximize the value of their vouchers, instead of just using the vouchers when and how they wanted.

  - Participants using paper Yellow Cab vouchers were effectively using a "wallet" model as they were allowed to use multiple vouchers per trip. Some riders had issues with drivers not accepting more than one voucher per trip, but most drivers accepted multiple vouchers per trip and riders reported appreciating the flexibility.

"I am thankful for what I received, any little bit of help is more than no help at all. Could there be more to help? Absolutely so! Maybe a credit dollar amount rather than voucher as vouchers are good for one ride only and credits can extend well beyond one ride given the cost of the ride."
— Participant

- **Giving riders enough vouchers to meet both needs and wants has a significant impact on quality of life.** When riders received more vouchers (e.g., $60-$120 worth), they were able to use their vouchers not only on their most fundamental needs, like getting to medical appointments and the grocery store, but also things that transportation planners often consider "wants," like visiting friends and family, going out to eat, or going to a sporting event. Riders who received more vouchers reported significant impacts on their quality of life.

  - Meanwhile, riders who received fewer vouchers (e.g., $20-40 worth) reported using them on essential trips only and needing or wanting more for their monthly transportation needs. Some participants reported saving their vouchers for emergencies and ultimately not using them before they expired.

"One month I got 6, it was perfect. Next month I got 4, a little limited. Then last month I only got 2. That was wasn't great as 2 is very, very limited."
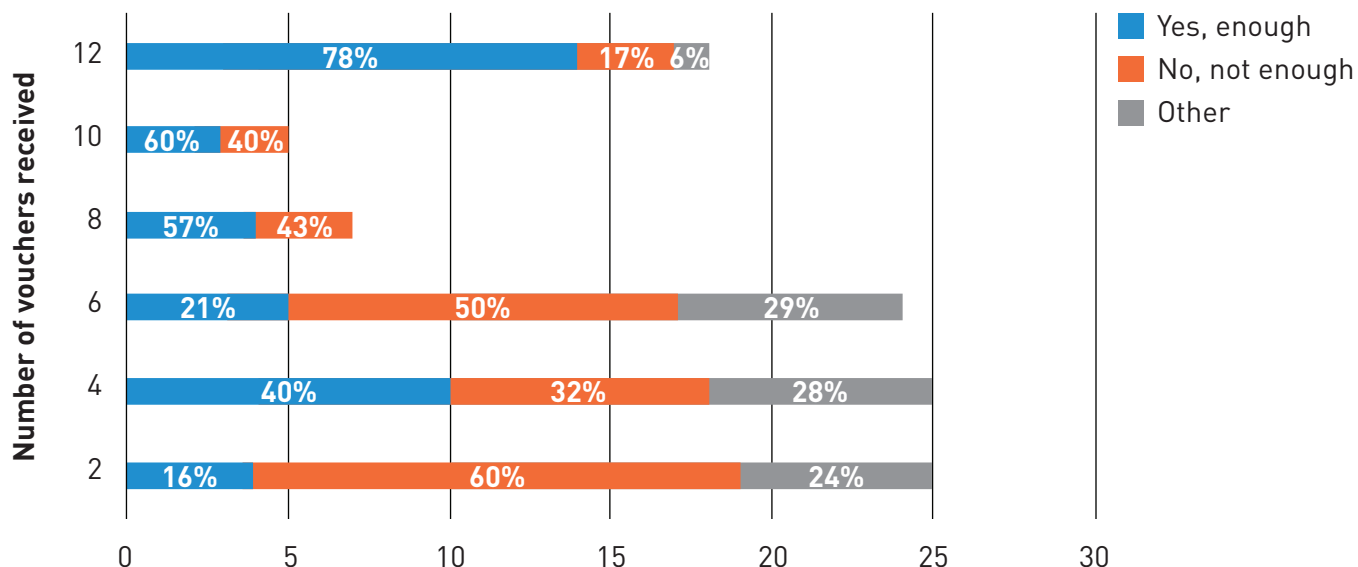*– Participant*

"I hoarded them and then one ended up expiring because I was worried I wouldn't have one when I needed it."
– Participant

- **Expiration dates may have created more problems than they solved.** To limit people requesting vouchers but never using them, we set all vouchers to expire at the end of each month. And because we didn't know at the beginning what percentage of participants would use their vouchers ("conversion rate"), we used expiration dates to understand initial conversion rates and to inform how many vouchers we could distribute the following month without exceeding our $58,000 cap. While the use of expiration dates achieved both of these goals, it also made it harder to distribute vouchers and harder for participants to use them.

  - For future programs using paper vouchers, consider not setting an expiration date. If expiration dates are needed, consider setting vouchers to expire every three months or at the end of each year instead of at the end of each month.

Did the number of vouchers you received feel like enough?

Legend:
- Yes, enough
- No, not enough
- Other

Chart (Number of vouchers received):
- 12: 78% Yes, 17% No, 6% Other
- 10: 60% Yes, 40% No
- 8: 57% Yes, 43% No
- 6: 21% Yes, 50% No, 29% Other
- 4: 40% Yes, 32% No, 28% Other
- 2: 16% Yes, 60% No, 24% Other

- For future programs using digital vouchers, distribution is less of a challenge, so monthly expiration dates are workable as long as the vouchers automatically renew at the start of each month.

- **A longer "soft-launch" phase prior to public launch may have helped identify and resolve challenges.** We soft-launched Ride Now for about one month before opening to the public. Our soft launch consisted of distributing an early batch of paper Yellow Cab vouchers to participants via our steering committee, Community Liaisons, and partner organizations. We started learning about some challenges through the soft launch, but could have made more progress on resolving those challenges before the public launch if we had given it more time.

  - For longer-term pilots or programs, consider starting with a 3-month soft-launch or "beta" phase with participants who are willing and able to experience some challenges

- **Direct engagement with drivers may have helped build familiarity and acceptance.** We left driver engagement entirely to the providers, but the steering committee believed we would have experienced fewer issues with Yellow Cab drivers not accepting vouchers if we had included drivers in our engagement activities. Some suggestions for driver engagement are:

  - Include drivers on steering committee (after providers are identified to avoid conflict of interest in selection process)

  - Convene a separate advisory group of drivers

  - Introduce drivers to potential riders before launching the program to humanize the transaction and help build awareness of rider needs
  - Host and record an orientation with drivers to introduce the pilot and ask one another questions about how it will work

  - Prepare more driver-facing communications about the pilot from the beginning

  - Distribute a driver feedback survey in addition to a rider feedback survey

PILOT DELIVERY QUICK FACTS

- **We distributed over 6,700 vouchers to about 1,000 participants**

  - Yellow Cab: 5,000 $10 vouchers to about 700 participants

  - Uber: 1,184 $20 vouchers to 218 participants

  - Lyft: 538 $20 vouchers to 133 participants

- **Overall, about 58% of participants used at least one voucher**

  - Yellow Cab: 400+ participants (~58%) used at least one voucher

  - Uber: 106 participants (49%) used at least one voucher

  - Lyft: 92 participants (69%) used at least one voucher

- **Riders took over 1,400 trips (on average, about 2 trips each)**

  - Yellow Cab: 759 trips, 1.9 trips/rider

  - Uber: 494 trips, 4.7 trips/rider

  - Lyft: 183 trips, 2.0 trips/rider

- **The typical trip was under 3 miles, took about 11 minutes, and cost riders under $5**

- **Participant characteristics** (estimated from results of a stakeholder survey conducted in fall 2021 and a rider feedback survey conducted in spring 2022)

  - **Program eligibility:**

    › 58-65% older adults

    › 50-62% people with disabilities

    › 4-8% caregivers or service providers

  - **Other demographic information:**

    › Up to 85% transit riders

    › Up to 25% Access-eligible

    › 58% have household income under $25,000

- Riders rated Ride Now 4.1 out of 5 stars on average.

★★★★☆

For more information, please check out the following resources:

- Rider stories of impact

- Rider feedback survey results

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are tailored to inform specific agencies and programs but may be applicable for other transportation programs serving older and people with disabilities. For all programs, recognize the need for accessible, affordable point-to-point transportation options for older adults, people with disabilities, and others with limited mobility.

SDOT'S TRANSPORTATION ACCESS PROGRAMS (TAP) AND RELATED PROGRAMS

SDOT's Transportation Access Programs (TAP) provide affordable, safe, and equitable access to public transportation by providing transit resources and community-centered programming to diverse Seattle communities.

The TAP team should consider and explore development of a long-term ride voucher program for older adults and people with disabilities. This ride voucher program can be flexible use (e.g., no restrictions on trip type or where trips start or end), transit-oriented (e.g., vouchers only work on trips starting or ending at pre-selected transit hubs), or a combination of the two. While Ride Now participants expressed a preference for flexible (e.g., point-to-point) mobility options, public transportation agencies often prefer to invest in transit-oriented (e.g., first-/last-mile) programming. If a point-to-point mobility option isn't possible, there are still opportunities to combine it with a more transit-oriented option in one program, rather than losing it altogether.

- To combine multiple voucher programs, set the more restrictive voucher program (e.g., the transit connection voucher) to apply first, and set the less restrictive voucher program (e.g., the flexible-use voucher) to apply if the first voucher deems the ride ineligible.

  - For example: A rider receives two transit connection vouchers and two flexible-use vouchers, and books a ride through the provider app. If the ride is eligible for the transit connection voucher (e.g., connects to an approved transit station), that voucher will apply. If the ride is not eligible (e.g., does not connect to an approved transit station), the flexible-use voucher will apply.

  - With this model, riders can access additional vouchers if they connect to transit, while still having access to flexible-use vouchers that may be more convenient for them.

- If further testing is needed, plan to pilot the service for at least one year to allow more time for outreach, pretesting, and building familiarity among riders, drivers, and other participants.

- There should be a clear process to determine whether and how to continue the service after the pilot phase to reduce gaps in service. People in the Seattle area are familiar with short-term pilots, but they can raise hopes and disappoint riders when they end.

- A long-term ride voucher program of this nature would likely require a team of at least two full-time equivalent (FTE) staff to manage design, outreach, distribution, and coordination: ideally a project manager and a coordinator.

- Consider collaborating with King County Metro and Sound Transit to design and/or fund this mobility option.

  - King County Metro manages a portfolio of on-demand and accessible services.

  - Sound Transit has an Innovation and Technology team and in 2021 adopted a realignment plan stating, "As part of the annual program review, identify opportunities and make recommendations to deliver flexible, innovative and affordable methods to get people to transit stations, if structured parking facilities have to be delayed."

The TAP team should also continue investing in free and affordable, low-barrier, flexible-use transportation options for specific populations with limited mobility or limited access to existing transportation options, such as older adults, people with disabilities, people with low or no incomes, and people who primarily communicate in languages other than English.

KING COUNTY METRO'S ACCESSIBLE SERVICES AND RELATED PROGRAMS

In addition to accessible bus service, King County Metro (Metro) offers a variety of accessible transportation services to meet the needs of riders with disabilities, with limited mobility, and/or with low incomes.

Access Paratransit

Access Transportation is Metro's paratransit program for riders with disabilities that prevent them from using public transit some or all of the time. Riders must apply and be found eligible before using the program and riders must request rides at least one day in advance.

Metro is developing a pilot service to provide a **same-day/on-demand alternative to Access paratransit** for Access-eligible riders. This pilot will offer eligible riders a significant improvement in convenience when compared to the current requirement that all rides must be booked at least one day in advance. Metro should consider opportunities to make this pilot service as low-barrier and flexible as possible:

- **Low-barrier:** Since allowing riders to self-identify as eligible may be infeasible for this pilot, consider pre-determining who is eligible and inviting them to use the service with no or minimal additional sign-up requirements.

  - Provide riders multiple methods for requesting rides (e.g., smartphone app, online booking platform, and phone dispatch).

- **Language access:** Ensure that riders can request rides in their primary language, regardless of booking method.

- **Flexible:** Consider placing no or few restrictions on when and where riders can request and take rides.

- **Multi-provider:** Consider using multiple providers to give riders options. To facilitate the use of multiple providers, consider contracting a technology provider to create a virtual payment card that can store value, apply program parameters, and be readily accepted across providers (e.g., has an associated 16-digit number that providers can process like a credit/debit or gift card).

- Virtual cards can also be printed as physical cards that riders can carry with them and use to pay for trips through in-vehicle card-readers.

- Program administration may be streamlined with the ability to set parameters (e.g., eligible locations) on the payment card rather than with the provider.

- **Driver engagement:** Consider opportunities to engage directly with drivers to better understand barriers, potential pain points, and potential solutions that will work for both riders and drivers.

"It was so good to have the freedom to go places without worrying as much about cost, and without having to plan for 30-minute pick up windows. I work full time and 30-minute pick up windows don't work for me because my schedule is too tight, but navigating buses is a challenge (finding bus stops, figuring out where to get off) and the bus doesn't always go where I need to go. I only wish there were more vouchers ... or that the $40 could be used on more than 2 rides. Wish this would stay forever!!!"
– Participant

"Ride Now helped me a lot to catch up with my doctor's appointments in time, I usually use Access Transportation, but they have very bad timing frame and they can make you late for your appointment. I wish the program could keep running and we could get more vouchers."
– Participant

Regional Reduced Fare Permit (RRFP) Program

The Regional Reduced Fare Permit (RRFP) gives riders ages 65+, riders with disabilities, and Medicare card holders reduced fares on participating transit agencies in the Puget Sound area.

Metro should consider and explore development of a "Guaranteed Ride" program for Regional Reduced Fare Permit (RRFP) cardholders. This program could be similar in design to guaranteed ride home programs offered to commuters as employment benefits, but designed for transit riders and administered by a public transportation agency rather than a rider's employer.

- Cardholders could be entitled to a certain number of on-demand rides per month (e.g., 8 one-way trips per month, or 1 round-trip per week) for times that transit doesn't fully meet their needs.

- Metro could contract one or more providers to fulfill these on-demand rides and could issue vouchers or credits to riders to cover the costs of the rides (fully or partially).

- As ORCA card capabilities continue to evolve, riders could eventually pay for these rides using their RRFP ORCA cards.

- Consider collaborating with SDOT's Transit & Mobility team to explore the development of this type of program.

Taxi Scrip Program

The Taxi Scrip Program serves low-income King County residents age 18 to 64 who have a disability or those who are age 65 and over. Once registered, riders can buy up to eight books of taxi scrip each month from Metro at a 50 percent discount to help meet their transportation needs.

Metro should consider opportunities to work with taxi and for-hire companies to improve driver acceptance of paper vouchers from riders. Also consider and explore development of a digital voucher option for use across multiple providers, including companies that currently accept taxi scrip as well as additional taxi, for-hire, and transportation network companies like Uber and Lyft.

FOR-HIRE TRANSPORTATION REGULATORS

King County's Records and Licensing Services (RALS) and the City of Seattle's Department of Finance and Administrative Services (FAS) partner to regulate the for-hire industry, which includes taxi, for-hire, and transportation network companies. RALS and FAS should consider the below recommendations when developing upcoming regulations and projects.

- **Language access is critical.** Consider and develop mechanisms (e.g., regulations, incentives, supporting funds, or central dispatch model) to ensure that riders can request rides in multiple languages—at least Seattle's Tier 1 languages, but ideally those in Tier 2 and Tier 3 as well.

- For upcoming **central dispatch for wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs)**, offer riders one phone number and one online booking platform (available via computer, mobile phone, or smartphone app) to make a request for wheelchair-accessible for-hire transportation, and ensure requests are distributed to all wheelchair-accessible providers operating in the region.

    - Ensure that the central dispatch mechanism is easily accessible in multiple languages, and give riders tools for communicating with their drivers after the ride is dispatched (e.g., in-app translation, over-the-phone interpretation, driver-facing communications with key information, etc.).

    - Consider developing central dispatch with input from a compensated steering committee of WAV riders.

- **Vehicle accessibility is critical.** The Wheelchair Accessible Services (WAS) Fund administered by the City of Seattle and King County is an important resource for supporting and expanding the availability of wheelchair-accessible for-hire transportation services, though a more robust fleet is needed, especially to provide response times that are comparable to those offered by the ambulatory fleet.

    - Continue investing in the expansion of wheelchair-accessible vehicle fleets and consider mechanisms like trip cancellation reimbursements and standby shift reimbursements to further incentivize driver availability.

    - Consider mechanisms to support or require transportation network companies (TNCs) such as Uber and Lyft to list wheelchair-accessible vehicles on their platforms. These mechanisms could involve collaboration between TNCs and taxi or for-hire companies that have wheelchair-accessible vehicles in their fleets, or they could involve TNCs contracting drivers of wheelchair-accessible vehicles directly.

Seattle
Department of
Transportation

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