8 STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW AND PUBLIC OUTREACH SUMMARY

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STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW SUMMARY REPORT

During October and November 2010, Nelson\Nygaard held a series of stakeholder interviews and focus groups. The consultant team spoke with a total of 41 individuals representing neighborhoods, businesses, and transit agencies, including planning and operations personnel. No City of Seattle staff was present at the interviews and stakeholders were guaranteed that their comments would remain anonymous.

The interviews used a common set of interview questions, although stakeholders were encouraged to talk openly about issues not covered by the questions. Common responses are summarized in this section of the briefing book. ***It is important to note that the information in this summary has not been fact checked and represents the opinions and perceptions of stakeholders, regardless of a factual basis, or lack thereof.***

Summary Overview of Findings

While stakeholder opinions were varied, almost all stakeholders shared some beliefs:

- Service frequency and reliability are the most important aspects of service quality that need to be improved.
- Regional agencies including King County Metro, Sound Transit and regional jurisdictions need to find a shared vision for public transportation and create a governance structure that supports that vision.
- Transit in Seattle needs to be more useful for more of the day. The system is very good for peak period commute travel to downtown and the University District, but other travel patterns are not always well served. Similarly, off-peak travel on transit is much less competitive with the automobile.
- Transit funding for service operation in Seattle needs to be increased, either through a new distribution approach (eliminate 40/40/20 policy) and/or creation of a local dedicated source of funding.
- Seattle needs to expand its intermediate or high capacity transit system so urban centers and major urban villages have service with quality comparable to Link light rail.
- Seattle needs a transit system where modes and agency operations are fully integrated and where transit, walking and biking are complementary.

The following is a more detailed summary of common stakeholder responses.

Vision for Transit in Seattle

- **A reliable, fast, and competitive transit service that retains a comprehensive service network.** The majority of stakeholders expressed a vision for a frequent, reliable and efficient transportation network. There was strong consensus among the group that transit would play an increasingly important role in personal mobility in Seattle and that improved service quality attributes, regardless of service mode, were essential to allow Seattle to grow gracefully, sustain economic growth, and to meet carbon neutrality goals. Many felt an important benchmark from the user perspective was developing service that is competitive with single-occupancy vehicle travel, for downtown commute trips and inter-neighborhood travel.
- **A fully integrated system**. Stakeholders envisioned a fully integrated system with higher density mixed-use land uses surrounding transit stations and higher capacity transit corridors, and a quality experience from door to door, including pedestrian and transit experiences.
- **A regional vision for transit supported by strong governance.** Many stakeholders had a new vision for transit governance; however, these visions ranged broadly from regional consolidation of transit governance and operations to enhanced local control. A strong message was that there was a need for a stronger regional vision that combines local and regional transit priorities allowing for a more unified regional front when working with the Federal Transit Administration and other federal funding agencies. Some stakeholders stressed that Metro and Sound Transit were too focused

on pure mobility ends, and that they weren't aligned with broader goals that local cities are attempting to achieve. Many stressed that we can't achieve a vision if we don't have one!

- **A transit system that supports balanced, livable street design.** Some stakeholders cited European cities as being more successful at combining successful transportation design with balanced, livable, pedestrian-oriented streets. However, most recognized this isn't a short term model for Seattle. While many agreed transit needs more dedicated rights-of-way, there was also a sense that change needed to progress at a reasonable pace to prevent backlash from auto users. The message from stakeholders is that we need "complete streets" that work well (for transportation) and are also well-designed and humane places for people. More of the public right-of-way needs to be reclaimed to create wonderful public spaces and enable walking, biking, and public transit.
- **A system where mobility and access is provided equally and affordably to all citizens.** Transportation is a right. All people, regardless of income, need to have equal access to transportation services that include good mobility for all, equal access to opportunities, and affordable cost. People should not need to own a car to have mobility and access. Even stakeholders that stressed the importance of high-quality, high-frequency corridor service, often noted that the social service aspects of transit delivered by providing good fixed-route coverage and paratransit service, are critically important and should not be neglected.
- **A city where it is viable for most people to live without cars.** There needs to be a drastic improvement in the attractiveness of transit in Seattle. Metro should be much easier, faster, and cheaper to use than cars, as well as provide seamless connections to all major destinations in Seattle. Metro needs to create the perception that Seattle is very easy to get around by transit (like New York City).

Top Priorities for Transit in Seattle's

- **Increase transit funding for Seattle.** Many stakeholders mentioned their concern for the 40/40/20 funding allocation strategy and the limitations it has imposed on moving transit ahead in Seattle. Most believe 40/40/20 has outlived its usefulness and needs to be eliminated and replaced with a more performance- based approach to allocating operating funds. Numerous suggestions were made by stakeholders for new or restructured taxes as funding sources. These suggestions related to the gas tax, commercial parking taxes, license tab fees, tolling revenues and other taxes. Several stakeholders would like to see improved operational efficiency to reduce costs.
- **Preserve existing service levels until the economy recovers.** Many indicated that a first priority in the current economy is to preserve the level of service we have and optimize that level of service.
- **Deliver on the capital plans that are already in place**. This includes Sound Transit Phase 2 build out, the First Hill Streetcar and Rapid Ride networks. Seattle and the region need to complete integrated station area plans for light rail and streetcar areas so that land use and rail planning are fully integrated in way that recognizes the entire trip, including bike and pedestrian connections to transit.
- **More frequency on non-peak and cross-town routes**. Similar to the vision for transit in Seattle, people want more frequent transit service that is reliable, minimizes the amount of transfers to reach a destination, and is safe. Stakeholders from neighborhoods such as Georgetown and South Park stressed that transit is critically important for residents and workers and their desire is simply for enhanced frequency on existing routes. South Lake Union residents and business owners desired better regional access as a major growing employment center, but also shared concerns with stakeholders from First Hill/Capitol Hill that very short transit trips in the Center City were not competitive with driving.
- **Expanded rail system.** There was strong common sentiment among stakeholders that the reliability and ride quality attributes of rail were desirable and that Seattle needs to pursue a more comprehensive rail network than what is planned.
- **Stronger role for the City of Seattle in transit governance.** While sentiments about transit governance ranged widely, there was a strong consensus that the City of Seattle needs to elevate its role in transit funding and governance. Stakeholders wanted to see a share of transit funding commensurate with demand allocated to Seattle, an issue tackled in the recent Regional Transit Task Force process. Some stakeholders were supportive of more

aggressive measures by Seattle to raise revenue for transit improvements in the city.

- **Dramatically improved Center City circulation.** Many stakeholders want Seattle to prioritize expansion of the Center City streetcar, improve wayfinding and real-time information at stops, make right-of-way modifications to improve bus speed and efficiency, and improve coordination of transit modes for transfers. There is a great deal of concern about the transparency of transit in downtown Seattle, particularly for infrequent users. Many felt an expanded rail circulator system could dramatically change how people chose to travel in and around the Center City.

Barriers to Success

- **Lack of resources.** After years of operating revenue growth, the economic downtown has crippled transit agencies' ability to grow service.
- **Seattle's dependence on the suburbs to realize its internal vision.** A lack of a consensus vision, even within Seattle keeps the City less powerful than it could be, at the regional and state levels. At the state level, there is a perceived lack of authority to work independently; and there is a disconnect between state and urban transportation needs. There is a need for a common front between operating agencies and the City to fully address transit speed, reliability and quality of service goals.
- **Lack of transit service to growing employment centers outside of the CBD**, such as South Lake Union and SODO, including direct access for commuters and circulation within Seattle Center City. Stakeholders in many of the downtown adjacent neighbors were concerned that current and some planned future transit services are overly focused on serving downtown, expressing a desire to see improved transit service to growing employment centers adjacent to downtown.
- **Topography and water.** Seattle's best assets are also major challenges for transportation providers. Unlike cities such as Portland or New York (Manhattan) that have complete grid systems able to move people efficiently, Seattle's many grids are disconnected by steep grades or waterways. This channels all modes into a limited number of corridors and makes decisions around right-of-way design challenging and acutely important.
- **Transit not able to compete with the private auto.** Some stakeholders saw numerous barriers to transit ridership—particularly the stigma associated with public transportation and its inability to compete with the private automobile.
- **Seattle does not do enough to discourage car use.** Discouraging car use is an essential ingredient in shifting mode split. For example, to be time competitive with driving, transit can go faster, but car travel times can increase as well. If car use does not become less attractive while Metro and Sound Transit becomes more attractive, mode share will not shift very much. Seattle Center City has over 70,000 parking spaces available to accommodate vehicles, which presents a challenge in creating a major mode shift.
- **Too slow to adopt technological tools that could improve efficiency and effectiveness.** King County Metro Transit and the region are not utilizing available information technologies to advance the convenience and quality of the transit user experience. Stakeholders point to the need for more open source approach to data management and information creating opportunities to leverage the wealth of software and information technology expertise in the Puget Sound region.
- **County transit governance is dominated by representatives from suburban jurisdictions**. Transportation needs in Seattle are very different than the rest of the county and politics and geographic equity (around funding) often trump need.
- **Lack of broad ownership or advocacy.** Seattle and the transit agencies should do more to build allies and partners in the community. Stakeholders expressed a variety of thoughts on this topic: "It seems that bike commuting makes you an automatic advocate, because you feel like you've gone "through something" to survive your commute." "It's invigorating in a way that riding transit isn't...it just makes you feel like a victim in some ways." "People need to be rallied to transit." Seattle is rapidly changing; this is less related to age as it is to how long you've lived here. So many new residents have come for Microsoft, technology jobs or bioscience related jobs. They want to live in an urban place and they expect a multimodal city with a great transit system. This defies income level as well, which is important.

Areas Where Metro and Sound Transit are Most Successful

- **Metro's geographic service coverage is very good.** Stakeholders recognized that King County Metro Transit provides very good service

coverage, with most neighborhoods provided good access to some level of transit.

- **High quality (frequency) service between most urban centers and urban villages,** particularly at peak hours and in particular for travel oriented to downtown and the University District. Stakeholders also recognized that service for commuters traveling at traditional peak periods to and from downtown is good, particularly in neighbors where King County runs peak-oriented express routes.
- **Link light rail provides a new standard for service quality and reliability.** There was tremendous praise for LINK station design and frequency of service. Many stakeholders believe that a rail system is generally at an advantage over bus service for urban riders.
- **Metro limited stop and express bus services work well.**
- **RapidRide is a step in the right direction.** It is making advances toward improving speed and reliability of bus service.
- **The Ride Free Area is an asset for certain populations, but unpopular with others.** However, overall opinions about the value of the Ride Free Aone were very divisive. Social and human service providers were strong advocates; in fact, it was probably the single most important feature of the system to them. Operators, business owners and user groups have higher levels of concern about impacts of the Ride Free Area on overcrowding, perception of security and revenue impacts. Operators interviewed were in favor of eliminate the ride free area, feeling that it reduces attractiveness, reduces efficiency (in terms of additional dwell time at stops in the RFA), and ability to collect payment.
- **Comprehensive paratransit service provided by Metro supports accessibility.** Paratransit to needed services and activities for disadvantaged and senior populations.
- **Most drivers are very good at their jobs**. Stakeholders found bus drivers to be friendly, and to work admirably under difficult circumstances.

Important Areas for Transit Improvement

- **Reliability.** People want to know when the bus is scheduled to be there and, when they get to the stop, when the next bus will actually arrive. Reliability problems vary from route to route. Management of the streets themselves (as SDOT responsibility), as well as management of Metro's routes, needs to be improved to reduce service gaps, bunching, and to make travel and wait times less unpredictable.
- **Transit speeds need to be more competitive with driving.** Metro and the City need to coordinate on strategies to improve the speed and reliability of bus service.
- **Bus transit needs to be elevated.** Metro needs to "get its swagger back," by making meaningful improvements to the bus system across the board. This goes beyond speed and reliability to look, feel, information and general usability attributes.
- **Increased frequency of service on core routes.** Among the most common response was the need to shorten headways to provide more reliable service and alleviate crowded busses.
- **Legibility and communication so that the rider knows what to expect and how to use the system.** Better customer information (active real-time information and passive). Metro is mysterious, especially for first time riders (e.g., visitors). This also translates to working with the public on studies and planning efforts – need to keep people notified about what's happening on their system. Seattle is a national leader in computer technology, yet transit information technology is lagging severely. Metro should leverage the tech savvy companies in the area.
- **Light rail station access.** Among the biggest concerns regarding Link light rail, was people's ability to access stations. In part, this reflected a desire for people not proximate to the new rail service to get to the train. Many complained about the parking policies that disallowed park-and-rides in the city of Seattle. Others wanted better east-west transit feeder service to Link.
- **Ease of purchase for ORCA fare cards.** Many complained that ORCA is complicated to purchase for seniors and those with mobility challenges. There needs to be a much broader network of distribution centers.
- **Safety and security.** There was also mention of on-board concerns, such as safety on certain routes, and occasional lack of or inaudible next-stop announcements.

Things Riders Want Most

- **Reliability.** Predictable arrivals and consistent travel times are more important than adherence to schedule since most Metro riders do not carry schedules.
- **Information/Legibility.** Schedules and signage at all stops. Need maps at all stops so riders can see their alternatives if their bus doesn't come.

Would like to see real-time information for bus transit.

- **Safety and security.** Including pulling to the curb, operating in a safe manner at all times, and security at stops and on buses. Transit police on buses.
- **Quality customer experience.** Using Metro needs to be a positive experience most of the time. Drivers are friendly, but crowds are not, particularly in Ride Free Area. Keeping drivers on the same route would help riders get to know their drivers over time.
- **Speed.** It should never take more than a half hour to get downtown from the outer neighborhoods, and transit should always be time-competitive with driving. Boarding times need to be much faster, comparable to light rail.
- **Less crowding.** Would prefer less crowding, especially during peak times. Need more humane loading standards in the inner neighborhoods and Ride Free Area.
- **High frequency service throughout the day on core routes.**
- **Affordable fares**. Including raising fares for more riders but providing for lifeline passes.
- **Better routings that better match origins and destinations.**

Transit Markets That Need Better Service

- **Dichotomy of priority.** While many stakeholders feel that transit resources should be focused in corridors where there is the highest demand and that Metro and Sound Transit should work to serve only those trips as efficiently as possible, others believe that transit should improve inter-neighborhood connections, and aim to serve users who travel at non-peak hour and are not travelling to or from the CBD.
- **Serving choice riders other than downtown oriented peak hour work trips.** Cross-town (non-downtown) service quality needs to be bolstered. "Choice" riders will need service that is much more reliable.
- **Tourism: there are major entry barriers for those not familiar with system.** Perception is that it is difficult to use Metro in the Center City if you have not used the system for years; very difficult to find basic information, buy a map, etc.
- **Need to find a way to get more weekend and occasional trips on Metro.** People who have many travel choices (cars) can be convinced to take Metro if it were more reliable and family friendly. Many families will use light rail, but the bus is too crowed and difficult to access with children, strollers and/or other personal items.
- **South Lake Union needs better connections to city of Seattle and region**. As a major emerging employment hub, South Lake Union needs much better service to all of Seattle and major regional transit transfer points.
- **Short Center City circulation trips**. Many short-hop trips in the Center City that only take 10 minutes in a car now take 30 or more minutes on transit.
- **Less emphasis on downtown-oriented trips and more emphasis on the grid network.** Stakeholders that lived or traveled frequently in South and North Seattle were most interested in an improved grid that included frequent crosstown services.
- **Emphasis on quality transit where tolling will be implemented.** Foreseeing a regional highway network that includes tolling on many major facilities, stakeholders emphasized the need for dramatically better transit service in corridors where tolling is likely to force a shift from driving to transit.
- **Later evening and night service (at least an 18 hour day).** Numerous comments were made about the need for later bus service to take people home from downtown Seattle and other job centers. There was also a desire by some to provide late evening service for recreational travel.
- **Seniors.** Transit needs to prepare for increase in senior population, providing fixed-route transit that accommodates their needs.
- **Cyclists**. Transit needs to work to support cyclists, not compete.

Other Cities that "Get Transit Right"

- **Cities with well-developed rail systems.** There was near unanimous expression that cities with well developed rail systems provide an important model for Seattle. Many people mentioned cities that either have historic rail systems or have made substantial rail investments in recent decades and cities where there is movement to continue expanding rail transit. Portland, San Francisco, Vancouver, BC, Washington, DC and New York City were mentioned the most often. Outside of the US, London, Paris, Toronto, and Munich were noted for their ease of use and friendliness to tourists.

Balancing Transit with Other Street Functions (traffic, parking, pedestrian space, and bicycles)

- **Prioritize arterial lanes for transit over auto.** Many stakeholders felt that Seattle's arterial streets should be prioritized for transit over auto circulation; several suggestions were made including signal prioritization, removal of on-street parking, and couplets. Many felt that strong transit along arterials and the availability of nearby parking would provide sufficient access for Seattle's neighborhoods.
- **Protect parking in neighborhood retail districts.** Other stakeholders issued concern about Seattle being too aggressive with parking removal on commercial arterials, particularly in neighborhood business districts. At least a few stakeholders familiar with the RapidRide program worried that implementation of parking removals for Seattle RapidRide lines would have a negative impact on small businesses.
- **Enhance passenger waiting/transfer space**. Many felt that pedestrian facility improvements benefit transit riders, and safety and accessibility for pedestrians should be prioritized.
- **Freight routes should be protected**. While stakeholders felt strongly that freight routes should be protected, no one was concerned that current transit priorities were a threat to freight movement.
- **Bicycle facility improvements are threat to transit speed and reliability**. Several stakeholders felt that city bicycle improvements, particularly bicycle lanes and other improvements that require dedicated space, are being overemphasized relative to the amount of people that use bicycles. Conflicts between bus lanes and bicycle lanes were pointed to as a major tension in the allocation of limited right-of-way on Seattle streets.

STAKEHOLDER NAME AND AFFILIATION

Bob Almquist, Plymouth Housing Group

Rachel Ben-Shmuel, Vulcan

Catherine Benotto, Weber Thompson

Mark Charnews, Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC)

Vicki Clayton, Cornish College of the Arts

Layne Cubell, Seattle Center

Ryan Curren, City of Seattle Office of Housing
Shelly DaRonche, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center

Richard L. Dyksterhuis, Bitter Lake/Broadview/Haller Lake Neighborhood Advisory Council

Lynn Frosch, Microsoft

Phil Fujii, Vulcan

Janie Garbin, Schroeter Law

Celeste Gilman, University of Washington

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Craig Helmann, PSRC

Sue Jensen, Bitter Lake/Broadview/Haller Lake Neighborhood Advisory Council

Larry Kalahiki, University of Washington Medical Center

Fred Kiga, Amazon

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Jill Mackie, Seattle Times

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Michael Meany, Virginia Mason Medical Center

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Robin Pentland, Acucela

Larry Reid, Georgetown Merchants Association

Charles Riley, South Park Business Association

Rob Sendak, REI

J. Rick Sepolen, ATU Local 586

Ed Shilley, Nucor Steel Seattle, Inc.

Jim Stanton, Microsoft

Brent Stavig, Starbucks

Brian Steinburg, Weber Thompson

Tony To, Rainier Valley Chamber Business & Community Action Group

Tom Trolio, Seattle Housing Authority

Bob Viggers, Charlie's Produce

Trey West, Rainier Beach Neighborhood Advisory Council

Steve Yaho, Low Income Housing Institute

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Survey Methodology

A web-based survey was conducted to gain an understanding of public perceptions and attitudes towards transit. The survey was posted on the City of Seattle's web site and was available in English and in six other languages. To encourage participation and help link people to the survey, 4,000 "business cards" were distributed to Neighborhood Service Centers and Community Centers. E-mail alerts were sent directly to over 200 community groups and key stakeholders. This section summarize responses from November 12, 2010- January 14, 2011.

There were 10,634 responses to the survey, however the results do not represent a statistically valid sample of the population. For example, over three-quarters of responses came from frequent transit users (see Figure B-1). Responses were most heavily concentrated in the city of Seattle but regional transit markets are well-represented in the results (see Figure 8-2).

FIGURE 8-1 HOW OFTEN DO YOU RIDE TRANSIT IN SEATTLE (AT LEAST ONE END OF THE TRIP IN SEATTLE)?

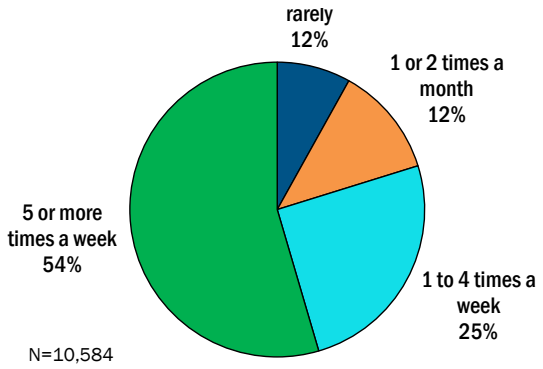
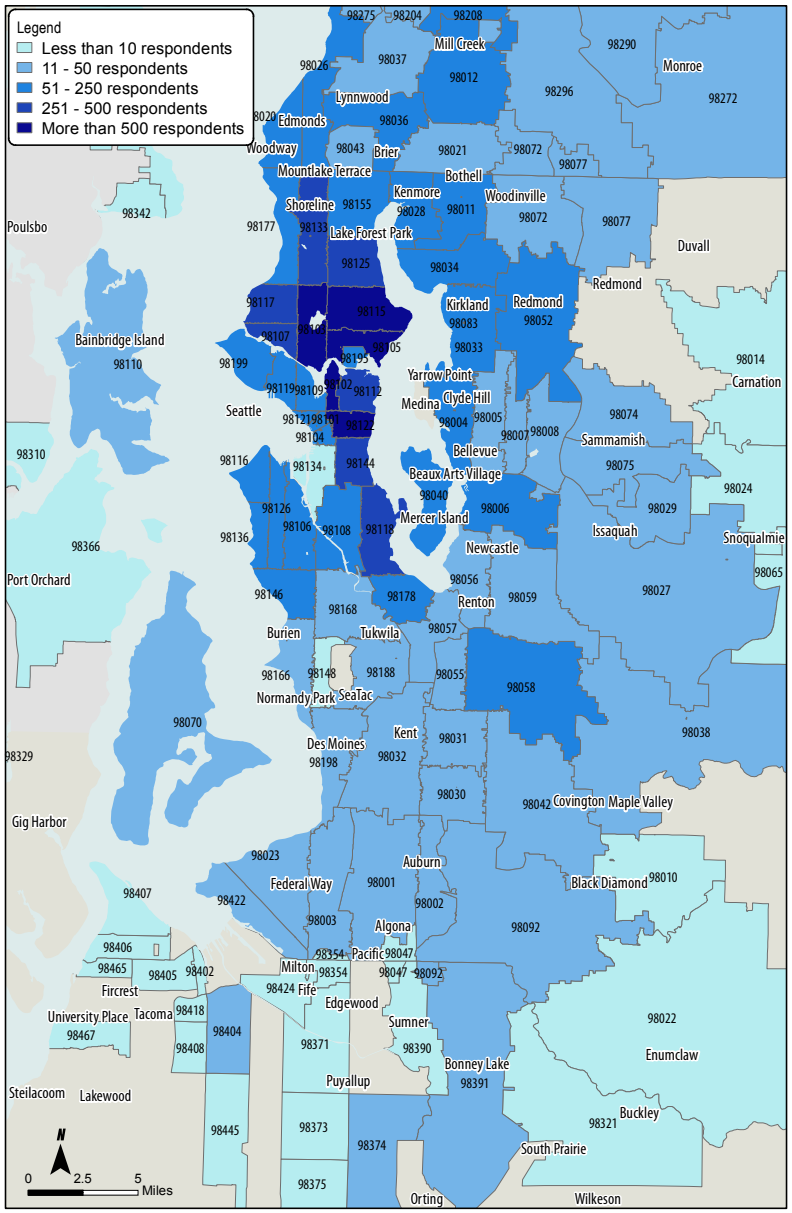


FIGURE 8-2 WEB SURVEY RESPONSES BY ZIP CODE



Survey Findings

How do survey respondents use transit?

- **Geographic Span:** The vast majority of transit trips (70%) among survey respondents were within the city of Seattle, while 30% of trips either started or ended outside of Seattle.
- **Access to Transit:** Most respondents (81%) walked to the bus or train on their most recent transit trip (Figure 8-3).
- **Trip Purpose:** About 29% of respondents use transit to meet most of their travel needs, while 11% use transit for different types of trips but more infrequently. About 52% of respondents use transit for commute trips only. (Figure 8-4).
- **Primary Use of Transit:** About 21% of respondents use transit because they do not have access to an automobile. The two most common reasons for using transit are to save money and because it is convenient (Figure 8-5).

FIGURE 8-3 HOW DID YOU GET TO THE BUS OR TRAIN ON YOUR MOST RECENT TRANSIT TRIP?

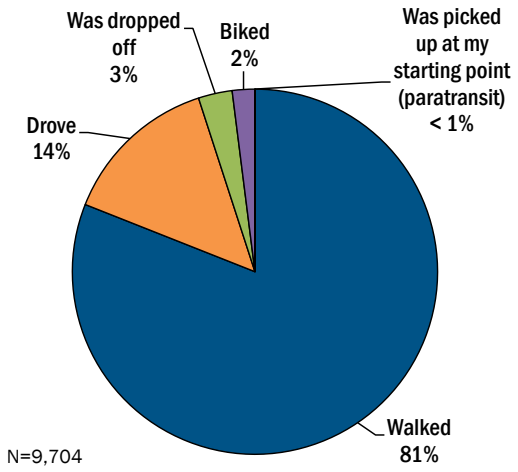


FIGURE 8-4 WHICH OF THESE SENTENCES BEST DESCRIBES YOU?

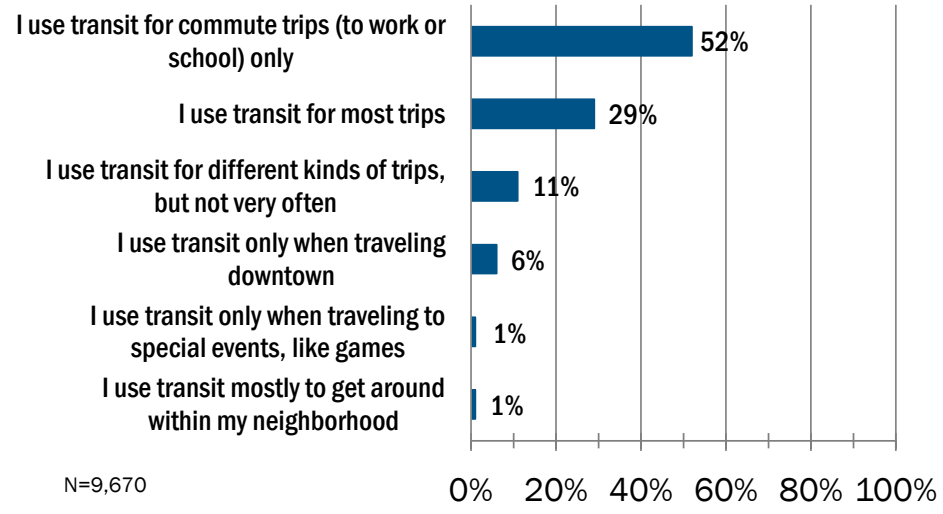
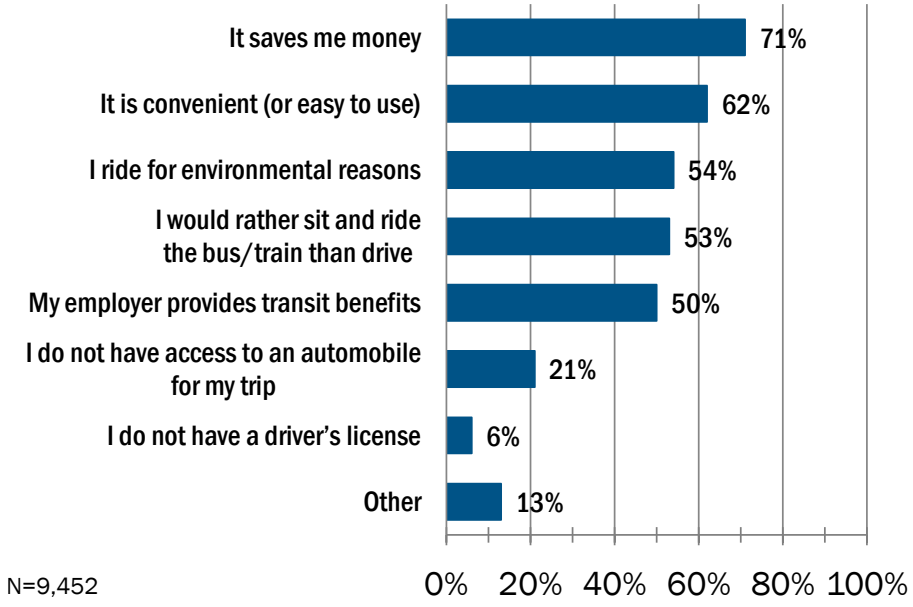


FIGURE 8-5 WHY DO YOU USE TRANSIT? (CHOOSE ALL REASONS THAT APPLY)



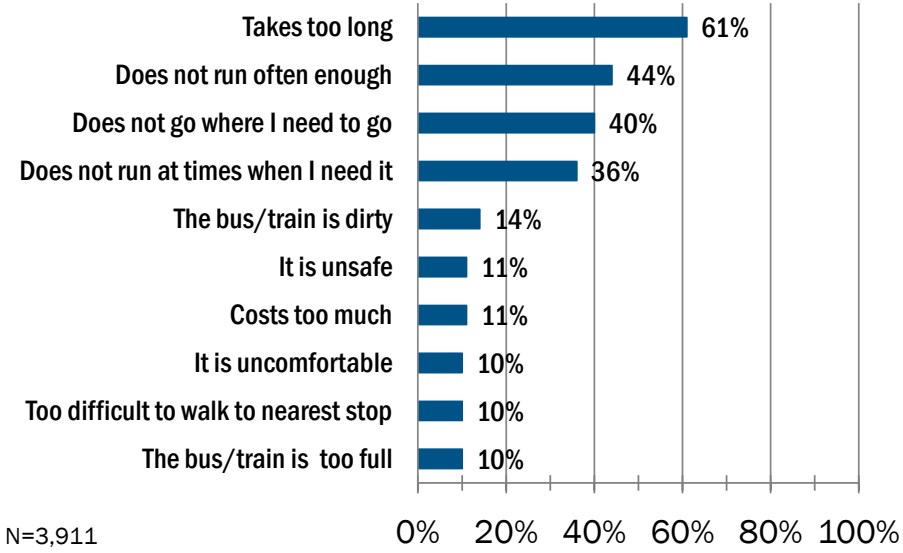
Why do infrequent riders not use transit more often? (Figure 8-6)

- **Takes too long.** About 61% of non-riders or infrequent riders identified the length of time a transit trip takes as a reason for not riding more frequently. Of the most recent transit trip taken by survey respondents, more than half of the trips entirely within Seattle took 30 minutes or longer (44% took 30-60 minutes while 10% took over an hour).
- **Other reasons identified include:** Does not run often enough (44%), does not go where I need to go (40%), or does not run at times when I need it (36%).

Among all respondents, which improvements would encourage more frequent transit use? (Figure 8-7)?

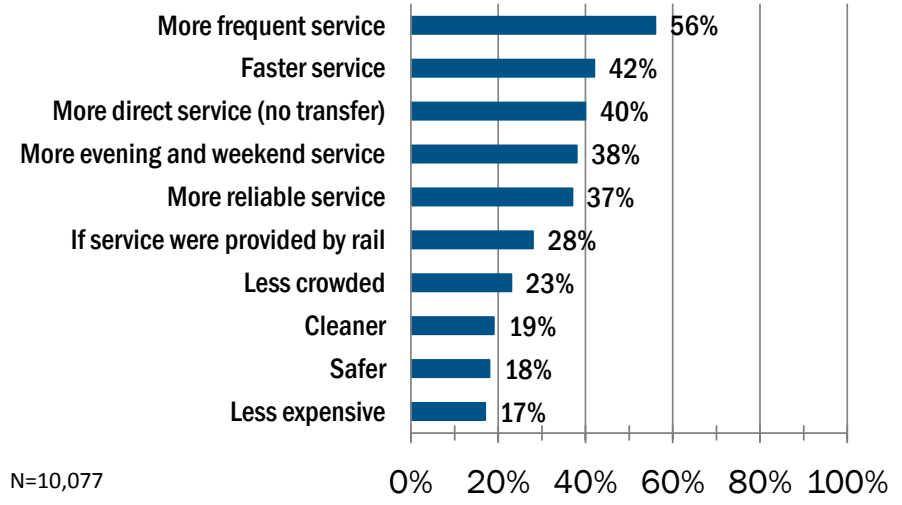
- **More frequent service.** The largest number of respondents (56%) identified more frequent service as an improvement that would encourage them to ride more often.
- **Other improvements identified include:** faster service (42%), more direct service (40%), more evening and weekend service (38%), and more reliable service (37%).

FIGURE 8-6 IF YOU NEVER OR RARELY USE TRANSIT, WHY DON'T YOU RIDE MORE OFTEN? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)



N=3,911

FIGURE 8-7 WHICH IMPROVEMENTS TO TRANSIT WOULD MOST ENCOURAGE YOU TO RIDE MORE OFTEN? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY - TOP 10)



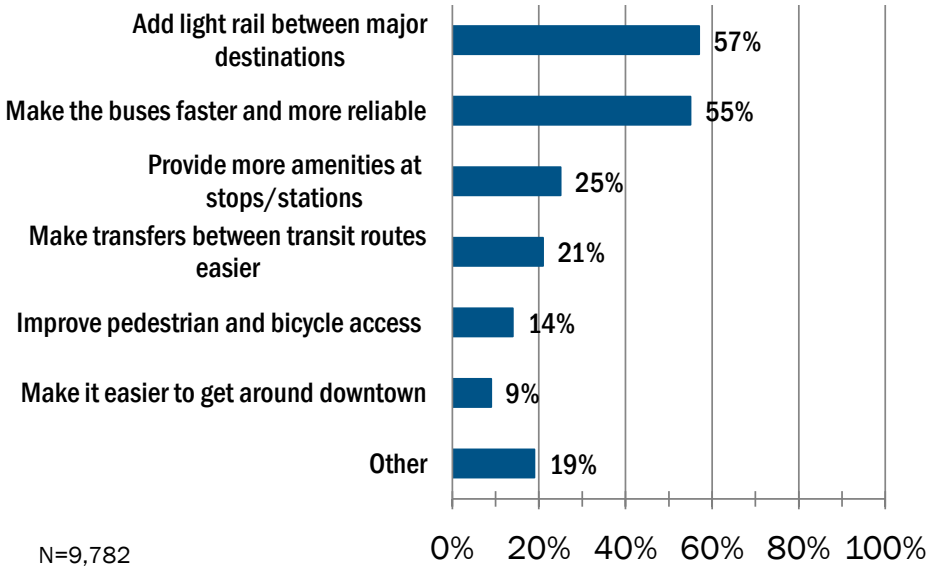
N=10,077

What outcomes would residents like to see from the Transit Master Plan? (Figure 8-8)

The top two responses were:

- **Light rail between major destinations.** About 57% of respondents wanted to add light rail between major destinations. There was no significant difference between frequent transit users and respondents who do not ride transit or use it infrequently.
- **Faster and more reliable bus service.** Nearly as many respondents wanted to make buses faster and more reliable (55%). However, only 41% of non-riders or infrequent transit users selected this option.

FIGURE 8-8 WHAT WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO SEE THE TRANSIT MASTER PLAN DO? (CHECK UP TO TWO.)



N=9,782