

Regional Fare Forum Meeting 3 Summary

August 4, 2025 | 9:30 – 11:30 AM
Virtual

Participants - Present

Shannon Braddock – Sound Transit	De'Sean Quinn – King County Metro
Siri Olsen – WA State Ferries	Kristina Walker – Pierce Transit

Participants - Absent

Scott Bader – Everett Transit	Rob Putaansuu – Kitsap Transit
Christine Frizzell – Community Transit	Rob Saka – City of Seattle

Executive Summary

The third Regional Fare Forum meeting focused on advancing discussions around equitable transit access and improving reduced fare programs regionally, with particular attention to eligibility, enrollment, and awareness. Members discussed current system challenges, such as data privacy barriers, inconsistent access to eligibility verification, and limitations for community-based organizations to purchase fares in bulk. The conversation also explored opportunities for pilot projects—particularly fare capping for low-income riders, seniors, and people with disabilities—as well as the importance of consistent regional messaging and user-friendly program design. While there was general enthusiasm for moving forward, members also expressed concerns about overcomplicating the system, adding unnecessary fare categories, and ensuring any new initiatives are achievable and deliver equitable outcomes.

Key Discussion Points

Reduced Fares & Equitable Access Background

- This region is an industry leader in offering reduced fares
- The approach has grown organically over time, leveraging passenger types, regional reduced fare programs, agency-specific products and programs, and partnerships to deliver reduced fares.
- Although the region offers a wide range of reduced fare options, reduced fare revenue accounts for a small share of overall fare revenue.

Current Challenges in Eligibility and Enrollment

- There are many distinct users of reduced fare systems, including riders, transit agencies, and partner organizations. Each user group experiences very different customer journeys.

- The journeys are most complex for riders who face the most societal barriers (and who often are most dependent on transit) and for organizations that serve them.
- Specific challenges were identified related to awareness, eligibility and enrollment, affordability, administration, and partnerships.
- Multiple reduced fare passenger types and programs exist, but processes are constrained by technical systems, database access, and risk-averse program design.
- Privacy restrictions prevent many community-based organizations (CBOs) from accessing databases to verify eligibility, particularly related to income. Future solutions that allow confirmation without sharing private information could potentially lower access and enrollment barriers.
- Bulk fare purchases by CBOs are currently possible through business accounts. However, since reduced fares can only be enrolled by individuals, these CBOs cannot purchase reduced fare products and manage them or load them on behalf of the riders they serve. Additionally, business accounts are not designed for the type of management CBOs would want to achieve and so they can be challenging and administratively burdensome to use for reduced fare purposes.

Opportunities for Action & Criteria for Change

- Transit agencies in the region are already engaged in improving reduced fare products and programs, including initiatives such as ORCA LIFT registry modernization, materials consolidation, ORCA LIFT pilots, and Human Service Bus Ticket pilots using ORCA.
- A collaborative, regional approach to addressing the challenges was broadly supported to ensure consistency and a seamless rider experience across agencies.
- Support emerged around solutions that focus on advancing equity, improving access, and managing risk while safeguarding personal and agency data/information.
- Some concerns were raised around potential solutions, including the impact of adding new fare categories on fare simplification goals and the risk of making processes more complicated while attempting to simplify.
- There was a recommendation for agencies to focus on taking an incremental approach to reduced fare improvements and using reduced fare products but to move quickly on these incremental steps so that efforts are achievable, produce the desired equity outcomes, and the benefits reach passengers. In addition, Executive Braddock encouraged consideration of moving forward with a pilot for fare capping on reduced fare programs.

Next Steps

- Meeting 4 is scheduled for September 23, 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM.
- Kristen Barton, Rachel Wilch, and Alex Krieg will meet individually with fare forum members prior to meeting 4 to share updates for those who were absent, address questions, and discuss early policy guidance and recommendations.
- Councilmember Quinn will meet with Councilmember Saka to review meeting 3 topics and staff will provide additional support as needed.