

Fares and Revenue: Fact Sheet and Frequently Asked Questions



“Because mobility is a human right, the ability to pay a fare cannot be a barrier to using transit.

That’s why I’m so proud of King County Metro’s work to prioritize accessibility across our entire network and to provide subsidized or free transit fares to our customers with lower incomes, customers with disabilities, seniors, and youth. Many employees and college students receive transit benefits through their workplace or school. In late 2020, we introduced one of the most ambitious undertakings in the country by launching fully-subsidized transit passes for our riders with the greatest need who qualify through state benefit programs. And, in 2022, through the state’s Move Ahead Washington funding package, we made transit free for young people up to age 18.

At Metro, we’re committed to prioritizing where needs are greatest and providing an all-day regional network of frequent transit service. As we rebuild even bigger and better than before, we’re appreciative and responsible stewards of the funds from fares, taxpayers, and employer partners that make safe, equitable, and sustainable transit possible. Thank you for helping us move forward together.”

– Michelle Allison, King County Metro General Manager

Our income-based approach to fares

Metro takes an income-based approach to fares, offering reduced or free fares for riders with lower incomes, riders with disabilities, seniors, and youth while asking those who can afford to pay to do so. We introduced a fully-subsidized pass for riders at the lowest income levels who qualify through state benefit programs, and launched a Free Youth Transit Pass for all young people up to age 18.

Adults ages 19 to 64
Check if your employer or school can help with costs

Adult ORCA
\$2.75

Youth ages 0 to 18
Youth ride free

Youth ORCA / Free Youth Transit Pass
No Cost

At or below 200% FPL
(federal poverty level)

ORCA LIFT
\$1.00

Seniors ages 65+

Regional Reduced Fare Permit
\$1.00

Disability or Medicare

Reduce Regional Fare Permit
\$1.00

Certain state benefit programs (ABD, HEN, PWA, SSI, TANF, and SFA)

Subsidized Annual Pass
No Cost



Customers can find the fare that’s right for them using our online tool at kingcounty.gov/metro/fares

Metro takes a targeted approach to fare subsidies, prioritizing investments where needs are the greatest as directed by the Mobility Framework and in line with King County's Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan while continuing to collect the fare revenue crucial to supporting Metro's expansive and frequent all-day network.

Why does Metro collect fares?

Fare revenue is a key pillar of Metro's financial structure. Metro's fund management policies, which are adopted by the King County Council, require Metro to maintain a farebox recovery ratio of at least 25 percent, with a target of 30 percent. This means that Metro strives to cover at least 25 percent of its operating costs in fare revenue.

What percentage of fare revenue comes from employer partners?

Roughly half of Metro's fare revenue is paid by businesses and institutions, including many of the region's largest employers (such as Amazon and Microsoft) and institutions (such as the University of Washington)

How much does Metro collect in fares?

What would be some of the impacts be if Metro went "fare-free"?

King County Metro collected \$167 million in fare revenue in 2019, with fare collection costs of \$17 million. Fare collection costs represent about 10% of Metro's total fare revenue. In contrast, some smaller transit agencies have eliminated fares in part because their fare revenue did not significantly exceed the cost of fare collection

In a fare-free scenario, fare revenue would need to be replaced or service would likely need to be cut. Metro has ambitious plans—guided by community members—for expanding its network that are predicated on continuing to grow fare revenue.

Further, without the participation of Sound Transit and other regional transit providers, Metro going fare-free could cause customer confusion, increase fare enforcement interactions for other agencies, and undermine Metro's ability to effectively integrate with Link light rail given the financial disincentive to transfer from a fare-free system (Metro) to a fare-charging system (Sound Transit).

What do Metro's customers want?

According to Metro's surveys, riders across all income groups report that having a network that is fast, reliable, and safe, and gets them where they need to go is equally or more important than fare discounts. Going fare-free would require significant service reductions without a sustainable replacement of that revenue.

Relevant resources

"Fares & ORCA" (King County Metro website)

kingcounty.gov/depts/transportation/metro/fares-orca.aspx

"Investing where needs are greatest" (King County Metro website)

kingcounty.gov/~media/depts/metro/about/planning/mobility-framework/investing-where-needs-are-greatest.pdf

"Executive Constantine's 2023-24 budget approved by King County Council" (King County Metro Matters blog)

kingcountymetro.blog/2022/11/17/executive-constantines-2023-24-budget-approved-by-king-county-council/

"Reduced fare portal" (King County Metro website)

reducedfare.kingcounty.gov/en-US/

"Which ORCA fare is right for you?" (King County Metro website)

kingcounty.gov/depts/transportation/metro/fares-orca/orca-cards/which-fare.aspx

About Metro

King County Metro is the Puget Sound region's largest public transportation agency. Metro provides bus, paratransit, vanpool, and water taxi services, and operates Seattle Streetcar, Sound Transit Link light rail, and Sound Transit Express bus service. Across King County, Metro serves 39 cities, as well as unincorporated areas. Metro is committed to providing safe, equitable, and sustainable mobility, and prioritizing service where needs are greatest.



Moving forward together