

Memo to Funding/Cost Management Subcommittee of Ad Hoc Long Range Metro Transit Planning Committee

From: Susan De Vos  
Date: November 6, 2007  
Subject: Small Buses

One of the major topics that the Committee was expected to discuss was "The possibility of the use of smaller buses and demand response, route deviation methods on certain generally low-use routes at certain off-peak times" but this has largely been ignored or worse. At the outset, Metro staff decided that it was unfeasible for it to use small buses and steered discussion away from the issue any time it could. Indeed, I was rather unpleasantly asked in response to bringing up the topic at a Marketing Subcommittee meeting what more I wanted anyway since Metro was going to recommend Bus Rapid Transit. Never mind that the BRT it envisioned was light years away from what my advocacy group was recommending. We are set to oppose Metro's scheme.

A major reason for the existence of this group was for us to break out of the cycle of continual fare increases and service cuts. So what did Metro do in response to the Mayor's request for a vision of what a 3% cut in Metro's budget would do? Suggested fare increases and service cuts. Any mention of reducing bus size on low-use routes at certain off-peak times? No.

Why not? Because Metro staff had decided at the outset that the issue was off the table. Now, you may hear the beginnings of talk to the contrary. For instance, at its November meeting, Chuck Kamp came to the UW's Campus Transportation Committee and mentioned, among many other issues, the issue of larger and smaller buses. Why? Could it be because this committee is going to have to address the issue when it makes its final recommendations to the Mayor? And given that any exploration of the issue has been squelched over the last number of months, what is the committee going to end up recommending—that it is a dead issue or one that is worth exploring? If we recommend that it is worth exploring, why did we not explore it?

Metro staff took the time to research and write a memo about Bus Rapid Transit but we shall be told that it does not have the resources to research and write something about small buses. That wouldn't have anything to do with the fact that it likes the idea of its version of BRT but does not like the idea of small buses would it?

I think the responsible thing to do is to comment on the lack of leadership, indeed obstructionism, that Metro staff has exhibited about the issue in this supposedly Long Range Metro Transit Planning Committee. I do not think that recommending further exploration without mentioning this obstructionism is sufficient.