



**King County
Department of Transportation
Metro Transit**

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**King County Metro Pandemic Flu Plan,
Summary
WSTA Executive Committee, April 21, 2006**

Pandemic Flu, Background

- Pandemic: worldwide spread of a new disease to which humans have little or no immunity resulting from prior exposure;
- Pandemics are inevitable, and occur with little warning and simultaneously in many places; they cause sickness and death, can disrupt critical services, cause widespread economic loss and can last for many weeks or months;
- In the 1918 pandemic approximately half a million people died in the U.S., compared with a normal flu season of 36,000; the 1918 pandemic spread across the U.S. in four weeks and across the globe in 4-6 months before the days of widespread air and car travel; the 1918 pandemic disproportionately killed younger, healthy people;
- Current outbreak has resulted in 194 laboratory confirmed human cases of avian flu, causing 109 deaths in 9 countries on 3 continents. 70% of those deaths occurred in people under age 25. This virus does not have the ability to sustain human-to-human transmission and would need to mutate further to do so;
- In King County, Public Health estimates over 1 million people would become infected, one quarter to more than one half million would become clinically ill, 24,000 - 57,000 would require hospitalization, and up to more than 11,000 would die.
- A pandemic would likely result in severe shortages of medical staff, beds, facilities, supplies, and mortuary capacity, and disruptions in infrastructure including energy, transportation, commerce, utilities, communications and emergency response;
- There is currently no vaccine available to prevent avian flu; available medications treat symptoms and are in extremely limited supply;
- The objective of pandemic preparedness planning is to limit sickness and death, maintain continuity of essential services, minimize social disruption and economic losses, and educate the public in ways they can reduce risks to themselves and others.

The following link to the King County Public Health Department's web site provides valuable information about pandemic flu planning. Click on "Resources of Local Government Agencies" to find an outline to begin developing your own agency plan. Additional links are provided to the Washington State Department of Health, the official U.S. Government site, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and the World Health Organization

(WHO) sites. They provide planning suggestions, background information and advisories: www.metrokc.gov/health/pandemicflu/index.htm

King County Metro Transit's Plan

A. Planning Assumptions:

- Metro's pandemic flu plan will be implemented when the King County Executive or King County Public Health Officer declares a state of emergency resulting from the emergence of human-to-human transmission of a pandemic illness;
- Public Transit is an essential service that must operate under emergency pandemic conditions to ensure residents with no travel alternatives have transportation for medical appointments, work, grocery trips and other essential travel. 12% of Metro riders have no car and rely on public transit for most or all of their transportation. Severe negative social and economic impacts would result from cancellation of all public transit services;
- Steps must be taken to protect transit employee health in a pandemic, particularly those who operate on the front-line in serving the public, such as bus drivers;
- Transit service will be planned to operate at a reduced level because employees and fuel may be in short supply, and demand for bus service is expected to significantly drop in a pandemic. Alternative service networks that provide the most geographic coverage and meet the most demand for service will be developed and implemented;
- The ability to continue operating transit service will be partially dependent on the ability of other County government functions to continue operating, such as accounts payable and receivable, purchasing and payroll.

B. Lines of Succession: To prepare for large-scale absenteeism stemming from employee illness, employees caring for ill family members, employees caring for healthy children at home during school or daycare closures, and employees who choose not to come to work out of fear, Metro developed a detailed plan for decision-making that identifies lines of succession five staff members deep for each supervisory and management position.

C. Identify Mission Essential Functions:

- Identify functions that must continue to operate under pandemic conditions, and those that could be reduced or temporarily suspended until the pandemic is over. Metro's examples of functions that must continue include bus operations, bus repairs, bus fueling, public information and customer service. Examples of functions that could be suspended include marketing, exterior bus washing, service planning and construction planning. This analysis should include consideration of calendar or seasonal variations. For example, some functions only occur at service change time, or around special community events.
- Where functions are identified that could be suspended during a pandemic, determine whether these employees can be cross-trained to perform other essential functions which may be short of staff. If so, develop a plan to conduct cross-training and determine which staff would supplement which functions.

- D. Identify goods and services supplied by others and determine whether supply chains could potentially be disrupted in a pandemic.** Determine what steps could be taken to address breaks in a supply chain and whether this would impact the ability to continue to operate essential functions. For example, if fuel supply is determined to be at risk, determine whether there is a means to stockpile a fuel supply, cut service levels to stretch available fuel for a longer period, change the fleet mix to rely on the most fuel-efficient buses, or other steps. (Note: throughout the Puget Sound region there is typically a 4-6 day supply of fuel available, but only a 3-4 day supply of ultra low sulfur diesel; Metro has a 2-6 day supply on hand at operating bases, and our fuel is barged from Alaska to Ferndale, pipelined from Ferndale to Tacoma, then trucked to Seattle; we currently have no means to stockpile additional fuel).
- E. Identify steps that can be taken to increase social distancing** to reduce the spread of disease. This could include measures such as expanded telecommuting, flex shifting to reduce overlapping shifts, reducing the number of meetings held so more work is conducted by phone or email, and implementing teleconferencing.
- F. Purchase in advance and stockpile supplies of products to protect employees** while at work, particularly employees who work on the front-line with the public, such as bus drivers and those behind a customer service counter. This could include alcohol hand sanitizer (gel or towelettes) and face masks. Employees should be trained to wash their hands frequently, maintain personal space, avoid touching, and cough or sneeze into the inside of their elbow, as avian flu is spread by droplets rather than airborne.
- G. Review Human Resources policies and collective bargaining agreements** to determine whether policy and/or contractual changes should be made to address expected needs in a pandemic. Seek governing board and union agreement or approval in advance, and define the circumstances under which such policy or labor agreement changes would be implemented. HR policy changes might include such measures as the ability to require ill employees to go home, additional telecommuting or flex shifting, a furlough policy if service cannot operate due to fuel shortages, etc.
- H. Evaluate existing technology capabilities** to determine if changes or expansions are needed. This might include additional GoToMyPC registrations, set-up of Virtual Private Network, teleconferencing capability, telephone system features (forwarding desk phones to home phones), establishing an employee hotline to disseminate information to employees during a pandemic, etc.
- I. Evaluate the existing network/system of bus routes and service to determine whether to plan an alternative reduced service network.** King County Metro developed two alternative bus service networks, labeled A and B. These alternatives largely mirror existing Saturday and Sunday service networks, but with additional trips planned in the peak period, and rely heavily on Park and Ride lot connections in

outlying areas. Alternative A requires approximately 60% of our bus drivers to operate and Alternative B requires approximately 40% of our bus drivers to operate. The locations of medical facilities were considered in determining what routes to operate, and the networks attempt to maintain broad geographic coverage while reducing service frequencies in many places. Metro's plan calls for the ADA Paratransit service area to shrink to match either Alternative Service Network implemented, EXCEPT that life-sustaining treatment (e.g. kidney dialysis), emergency medical appointments and work trips would continue to be honored throughout the regular paratransit service area.

- J. **Coordinate with various agencies and constituencies** who may have a stake in or be affected by your plan. King County Metro coordinated its plan with the King County Public Health Department. This included requesting recommendations on ways to protect employee health, locations of key medical facilities to ensure they are well served in our reduced service networks, and obtaining an understanding of the history and likelihood of a pandemic. Confirm with the local Public Health Department whether cancellation of transit service will be one of the "social distancing measures" implemented along with possible school closures, cancellation of public gatherings, etc.; Metro also coordinated with a Business Leadership Circle that convenes quarterly to work on Pandemic Flu Planning. This group includes several dozen large employers in the region plus several "infrastructure" agencies such as Seattle City Light. The purpose of coordinating with this group is to understand their needs and expectations of transit in a pandemic and inform them of our service plans.