



MEMORANDUM

To: Transportation Commission

From: Thomas Valdriz, Principal Transportation Planner
Kim Scrivner, Senior Transportation Planner

Date: April 22, 2026

Subject: Transit Needs Study Public Engagement Approach

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Transportation Commission review and provide feedback on the proposed public engagement approach for the Transit Needs Study (TNS).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- The City is initiating the TNS to better understand transit needs or gaps, with the goal of identifying future actions the City can take to reduce barriers to transit use. These actions will aim to increase overall ridership and help manage future growth-related congestion through advocacy, partnerships, or direct City investment.
- Staff requests Commission feedback on the proposed public engagement approach.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Kirkland's Comprehensive Plan envisions a complete and equitable community where people who live, work, and visit can reliably access amenities and opportunities¹. High-quality, affordable, and accessible public transit service is necessary for the City to achieve this vision and meet its related mobility and land use goals, as described in the Comprehensive Plan's Land Use² and Transportation³ Elements.

Since 2019, Kirkland's transit service providers have faced ongoing financial pressures, operational challenges, and significant shifts in rider travel behavior that have led to widespread service reductions throughout the region. While travel patterns have largely stabilized post-COVID, funding and operational challenges have persisted, limiting transit agencies' ability to keep pace with growing community needs.

¹ Link to City of Kirkland Comprehensive Plan:
<https://kirkland.municipal.codes/CompPlan>

² Link to the City of Kirkland Comprehensive Plan Land Use Element:
<https://kirkland.municipal.codes/CompPlan/3>

³ Link to the City of Kirkland Comprehensive Plan Transportation Element:
<https://kirkland.municipal.codes/CompPlan/5>

Transit Needs Study Scope of Work

Kirkland Transportation Strategic Plan Policy T-3.8 commits the City to conducting a transit needs study that evaluates future transit needs, supports regional advocacy for better service, and identifies potential alternative transit services, especially for populations who do not have access to, or cannot drive⁴. The Transit Needs Study will assess where transit service gaps and barriers exist and identify actions the City could pursue to enhance mobility, equity, and access for people who live, work, and visit Kirkland, whether through City investment, partnerships, or advocacy with transit providers.

Staff briefed the Transportation Commission on April 23, 2025⁵, providing a background on the study and received feedback on the initial scope of work. This feedback was shared with the City Council at the June 3, 2025 Study Session⁶ before the scope was approved at the September 2, 2025⁷ Council meeting.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:

Public Engagement Approach

Public engagement for this study is essential because transit needs vary widely across the community, and understanding those needs requires hearing directly from the people who rely on transit the most. Engagement helps to ensure the study reflects real travel patterns, barriers, and lived experiences, and not just data.

At the same time, Staff recognizes that Kirkland and its transit service providers have recently asked the community for feedback on transit-related topics many times over the past several years. Examples include outreach conducted for the Transportation Strategic Plan update⁴, Metro's RapidRide K Line project⁸ and East Link Connections project⁹, and Sound Transit's East Link /Line 2 Extension project¹⁰.

⁴ Link to City of Kirkland Transportation Strategic Plan:

<https://www.kirklandwa.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/public-works/transportation/plans-and-studies/kirkland-tsp-final.pdf>

⁵ Link to April 23, 2025 Commission Agenda Item:

<https://www.kirklandwa.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/boards-and-commissions/transportation-commission/2025/04-apr-23/transit-needs-study-memo.pdf>

⁶ Link to June 3, 2025 City Council Agenda Item:

https://www.kirklandwa.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/city-council/agenda-documents/2025/june-3-2025/3a_study-session.pdf

⁷ Link to September 2, 2025 City Council Agenda Item:

https://www.kirklandwa.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/city-council/agenda-documents/2025/september-2-2025/9b_business.pdf

⁸ Link to the RapidRide K Line Project:

<https://www.kirklandwa.gov/Government/Departments/Public-Works-Department/Transportation/Getting-Around-Transportation-Division/RapidRide-K-Line-Project>

⁹ Link to the East Link Connections Project:

<https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/metro/programs-and-projects/east-link-connections>

¹⁰ Link to the East Link / 2 Line Extension Project: <https://www.soundtransit.org/system-expansion/east-link-extension>

The TNS will build on these existing insights rather than asking the same questions again. Using community feedback already collected, combined with travel and land-use data analysis, the engagement process will dig deeper by developing five focus groups comprised of community members representing:

- Youth
- Elders/Seniors
- BIPOC Community Members
- Businesses / Employees of Kirkland Businesses
- The General Public / Other

This approach balances efficiency with depth. It respects what the community has already shared while while creating space to understand existing unmet needs and emerging service gaps. An outline of the draft public engagement approach is included as Attachment 1.

Feedback Requested

Staff requests Transportation Commission feedback on:

- Are there any voices missing from the proposed focus group categories that should be included in one or more of these groups?

NEXT STEPS:

Staff will develop a tailored community engagement plan for the TNS based on Commission feedback.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1. Draft Public Engagement Approach