Transportation for Diverse Communities

2022 Combined Focus Group Findings

Caption: An older dark-skinned woman sitting on a bus, wearing a mask.

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Introduction

In the spring and early summer of 2022, the Hopelink Mobility team convened two focus group projects to learn from community members their experience of the transportation network in King County and their communities. This report combines the findings of those two efforts, highlighting broad community needs specific to the specialized transportation users in King County, particularly older adults, adults with disabilities, community members from diverse backgrounds, and those with limited English proficiency.

The first project, Eastside Mobility for All, was the result of coordination efforts from the Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative (EERC) who identified service gaps in Redmond, Kirkland, and Bellevue and sought funding sources to address these gaps. The EERC partner Sound Generations was awarded funding from the National Center for Mobility Management to use a human-centered approach to identify design alternatives for a potential pilot service.

The EERC team developed three design alternatives and conducted three focus groups to test and alter the designs. A full report of this design and review process is available in Appendix A. Summary themes and findings are included in the following section.

The second project was a partnership between the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) and the King County Mobility Coalition to conduct focus groups with community members of diverse backgrounds. The NADTC conducts regular surveys to understand national transportation needs, mobility challenges, and service gaps affecting older adults and people with disabilities.

The King County Mobility Coalition conducted three focus groups involving community members with diverse backgrounds. For this project, diversity was defined as identifying as members of BIPOC or LGBT communities, and all forms of linguistic diversity. Each focus group had a secondary affinity group; older adults, adults with disabilities, and caregivers. A full report on the focus groups, their organization and findings can be found in Appendix B. Summary themes and findings are included in the following and combined with findings from the Eastside Project.

About Hopelink

Since 1971, Hopelink has served homeless and low-income families, children, seniors, and people with disabilities in King and Snohomish counties, providing stability and helping people gain the skills and knowledge they need to exit poverty for good. Hopelink provides a network of critical social services through various programs, including housing, transportation, family development, financial assistance, employment programs, adult education, financial literacy training, and five food banks. The agency's service centers, housing, and transportation programs help more than 63,000 people annually.

Hopelink's Mobility Management team empowers people to change their lives by facilitating access to the community. We do this by (1) providing travel education and resources to build awareness of existing transportation options; (2) supporting the coordination of special needs transportation through cross-sector collaborations; and (3) gathering data and needs assessment to recommend and implement improved services. We work to make it easier for everyone to get around King County through innovative and collaborative problem-solving.

The King County Mobility Coalition – a coalition staffed by Hopelink's team - envisions a connected community where everyone can move freely in the region. We work to ensure transportation options
meet community needs, especially for older adults, people with disabilities, veterans, youth, and community members who speak languages other than English.

Local Context
King County is the largest county in Washington State, with an estimated population of 2,326,040 residents. According to the Puget Sound Regional Council, approximately half the population have specialized transportation needs, whether owing to age (people under 18 or over 65 years old), income (people at or below 200% FPL), or disability status. The transportation options available to King County community members vary greatly depending on the specific area of the county.

Two main public transit agencies serve the county; King County Metro, which operates within and between cities, and Sound Transit, which operates the region's light rail system and the cross-county bus routes. Fares range from $0 to $2.75 on Metro and $0 to $3.50 on Sound Transit. The fully subsidized option is available to community members enrolled in a set of 5 state support programs. Riders 65 years or older or individuals with a qualifying disability can pay $1. Riders who are at or below 200% FPL can pay $1.50.

The county operates a paratransit service, Metro Access, available for curb-to-curb, door-to-door, and hand-to-hand services to enrolled riders who are otherwise unable to access fixed-route bus services. The level of service is determined during the enrollment application process. Rides are scheduled at least 24 hours in advance, with seven days recommended. Fare for Metro Access is $1.75; personal care attendants ride free.

In addition to these standard transit options, King County also has many non-profit and volunteer-based transportation options to meet the needs of specialized transportation riders. Many of these services are free with an optional donation. Eligibility is usually determined by age, ability, or income. These services are scheduled in advance, many requesting at least 24-hour notice and recommending more. These specialized transportation services are discoverable on our online database www.FindARide.org.

Joint Findings and Themes
The focus groups provided meaningful insight to the experiences of diverse community members as they seek and access transportation options. These findings focus on the perspectives of diverse community members whose views are often overlooked in traditional surveys. The projects compiled qualitative data detailing the existing processes and, in the case of the Eastside project, provided details on what the preferred system could look like.

Together these projects highlighted:

- Transportation options need to be easily discoverable, affordable, and accessible.
  - Community members want to access transportation services and learn about them from trusted agencies. Technology (apps and websites) supporting scheduling or discovering services should be accessible across many languages and comfort with technology.
  - When scheduling services, community members want flexibility and spontaneity. Twenty-four-
hour advance booking is acceptable but same day booking would be beneficial.

- The current transportation system does not meet community needs. Due to lack of service, many trips are impossible or difficult to complete. This includes few options in suburban and rural areas and few viable options for cross-county or long-distance trips.
  - Strict service areas often do not meet community needs for connecting to major cities or key destinations.
  - Community members supported expanded hours for specialized transportation services. Many current programs stop their hours of operation in the early evening. Focus group participants prefer a Monday through Friday 8 AM – 8 PM option, especially if supported with additional service outside these hours or on the weekend.

- Public Transit Operators must be equipped with training and tools to support diverse riders. This includes assisting people using mobility devices as they enter and exit the vehicle and cultural training to ensure the safety of all riders.
  - Specialized transportation services should make it clear when riders can bring a companion. Program policies relating to riding companions should be clearly communicated both in promotional material and easily answered by drivers and call center staff.
  - Many specialized transportation users may prefer assistance with heavy items during boarding and deboarding.

As we review the findings from these projects, several needs align with themes and data compiled in the 2021 King County Community Transportation Needs Assessment published by the KCMC last year. These include expanded service hours, increased connections within and throughout neighborhoods, and physical infrastructure supporting more users such as adequate sidewalks, lighting, shelter, and seating.

Through the focus on diverse community members, these projects revealed needs unique to diverse community members but beneficial to all riders. They include a focus on safety, both physical and psychological; a desire for robust cultural training for transportation professionals and resources to support riders who experience discrimination or inappropriate behavior; to partner with trusted community-based organizations with proven relationships and track records.

Action Items and Next Steps
The King County Mobility Coalition will move forward with these findings and continue to advocate for and build toward the vision of a coordinated transportation network allowing all people to move freely around the region.

Concurrently, the King County Mobility Coalition will use these findings to inform the 2023-2025 Action Plan. The Action Plan will set the stage for the Coalition’s priorities, initiatives, and projects.

Likewise, the Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative is partnered with Sound Generations and the National Center for Mobility Management to support the launch of the pilot service which these focus groups
helped design. EERC will gather findings from the pilot to inform further investment and coalition building in East King County.

Appendix A: Eastside Mobility for All Focus Group Findings
Eastside Mobility for All Grant Project
With National Center for Mobility Management

Scope of the project:
Members of the Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative coalition identified gaps in transportation services on the Eastside, particularly in Redmond, Kirkland, and Bellevue. A team was developed to address community members who face transportation barriers as they attempt to access essential services, as well as community and peer support opportunities. Immigrants, refugees, and those with low and moderate incomes were central to the planning process in working on a solution.

While there are robust public transit options in certain areas, the network is focused on peak commuters. The region is well connected socially; interviews revealed individuals live in one city but their grocery store and/or religious institution in another. The target community includes dense downtowns, but most are made up of traditional, suburban developments.

All three cities are culturally diverse and have similar economies. For example, 50% of Bellevue’s population is non-white, 39% of its population was born in a foreign country, and 43% speak a language other than English at home.

The team aimed to develop a transportation solution to address the gaps in services negatively affecting a number of residents on the Eastside.

Initial Information Gathering
In preparation for the grant application, the team gathered information from the target communities. Interview teams listened to riders, family members, caregivers, and advocates of those who seek accessible transportation in Bellevue, Kirkland, and Redmond. The consensus was little or no accessible and affordable transportation options are available in these communities. Identified barriers include:

- Isolated neighborhoods with no public transportation
- Absence of sidewalks and curb cuts for wheelchairs and other mobility devices
- Poor lighting
- Limited bus shelters
- Access to bus stops within a reasonable distance is limited
- Limited-service hours
- Limited-service boundaries
- Bus stops not close enough to desired destinations (community organizations, religious institutions, etc.)
- Supplementary transportation options often have smaller vehicles that can’t accommodate mobility devices
• Fears of traveling resulting from recent incidents of aggression targeting Black and Asian people in particular

Three Concepts
The team was awarded the grant providing them the opportunity to move forward with a transportation solution. As part of the grant project, the project team developed three potential concepts they would later present to focus groups in the community. The three concepts were Eastside Drop and Go, Same Day Demand/Response, and the Great Grocery Shuttle.

Concept 1: Eastside Drop and Go
Eastside Drop and Go would operate as a community-organization based van service for older adults. Vehicles would be assigned to a local senior or cultural organization within the three cities and be used for transporting riders as well as services (ex. food delivery, cots, etc.). Vehicles would be available during core hours (7am-7pm, M-F) and available based upon sponsoring organization’s driver’s availability. Drivers would primarily be volunteers and employees from the sponsoring organization. All drivers would undergo a background check and training. Primary destinations would include any location within the three cities, with the opportunity to serve special destinations outside of the three cities if the van’s schedule and driving capacity allows. There would be a two-hour limit for each trip (to/from). Vehicles would be owned and maintained by an umbrella organization, focused on providing community transportation. The umbrella organization would help the sponsoring organization with paying for their employee’s time, recruiting/training new volunteer drivers, and with the sponsoring organization’s scheduling/reservation process.

Concept 2: Same Day Demand/Response
The Same-Day Demand Response service would offer free, same-day, door-to-door transportation service for older adults 55 and older, Persons with Disabilities, BIPOC community members, and immigrants, serving any destination within and between the city limits of Bellevue, Kirkland, Redmond, as well as transit services connecting to Seattle and Snoqualmie Valley. Vehicles would arrive within an hour of booking. Operating hours would be from 7am-7pm, 7 days a week. The services' vehicles would consist of a fleet of low-riding, electric vehicle passenger vans equipped with ramps or lifts with minimum capacity for one rider, one companion, and mobility devices including motorized wheelchairs. Drivers would be trained to provide caring, compassionate, and culturally sensitive service. Riders would be able to bring along companions and parcels with them. Riders would book the service by phone or online/app. Either way, callers would be contacting a command center staffed with representatives trained to work with linguistically and culturally diverse populations. Organizations would be able to book rides on behalf of riders as well. Riders would be able to book rides in advance, both recurring and one-time trips and could specify a solo or shared ride with shared rides as the default. The service would be operated by a human services nonprofit organization connecting them with additional high-demand services including food delivery, health services, and social connection.

Concept 3: Great Grocery Shuttle
Great Grocery Shuttle would provide door-to-door older adult residents of the three cities transportation to food destinations such as food banks, grocery stores, farmers markets, social gatherings, meal programs at senior centers, open kitchens at nonprofits/community centers, and faith-
based meal programs. Operating seven days a week from 7am-7pm, a fleet of wheelchair-accessible vans (capacity 14 or less) would pick up riders at their home and drop them off in front of their destination; each ride will be a two-hour block from pick-up to drop-off. There are six trips per day and two round trips per rider, all at no cost to the passenger. A trip assistant would be available to travel with a rider during their block to help with their shopping, accompanying them in the store and with packing/loading their groceries into the vehicle and their homes, if wanted. Trip assistants would be trained in first-aid, AED, CPR – with a phone for contact with emergency services. Ideally, trip assistants would have a CNA background. Trip assistants would be insured and paid but could also be pulled from the pool of volunteers at Sound Generations, Hopelink, etc. for drivers and their vehicles, if needed. Drivers and Trip Assistants would be trained in cultural competency and, ideally, reflect the communities of riders. Riders, caregivers, and agencies can book rider’s first ride through an initial intake process over the phone with the transportation provider who would connect them with other services if applicable. Recurring rides could be scheduled over the phone or with the driver in advance, both to and from the food destination. Those who favor a grocery store could be matched with other riders to shop together.

**Human-Centered Design Approach**

In an effort to use human-centered design in developing a transportation solution to meet the needs of the community, focus groups were organized and facilitated in each of the three cities outlined in the grant application. Careful consideration was made to include non-English speakers, all of whom were seniors. In all, five focus groups were held; one in Spanish, Hindi, Russian, Chinese, and English. The focus groups had 4 to 6 participants and each concept was presented to the members of each group. Participants were asked for their feedback in an open discussion format.

**Common Themes**

Participants in all five focus groups expressed a preference for arranging transportation through a community-based organization familiar to them. This was particularly true for those who speak a language other than English. Most participants said they would be content with 24-hours advance notice for booking a ride, but same-day booking would be beneficial. A few participants expressed a desire for a trained assistant to help them with their trip, preferring to bring a companion of their own choosing. However, some members stated they could use minimal assistance with getting on and off the vehicle, as well as some help with heavier items. Most participants favored services Monday through Friday, approximately 8am-8pm, with the option of weekend services on a reduced schedule. All focus groups expressed interest in destinations outside the designated service area, specifically mentioning Issaquah, Sammamish, and Seattle.

**Contrasting Themes**

One contrast emerged between focus groups: the Chinese language focus group prefers a booking system that includes an app, enabling language interpretation services for multiple languages, while the Spanish and Hindi language focus groups expressed a strong preference for booking transportation over the phone with language interpretation services.

A summary of the participants’ feedback is provided below.

Participants desired the following in a transportation service:

- Service available M-F 8am-8pm, with some weekend service available.
• Occasional destinations outside of the service area including Issaquah, Sammamish, and Seattle (Bothell, Lynnwood, and Edmonds were also listed by some participants).
• Ability to book rides in their preferred language (either an app or through a phone call, with most preferring a phone call).
• Ability to coordinate rides through a community-based organization familiar to them.
• Same day booking preferred, but 24-hour advance notice is acceptable.
• Door-to-door service.
• Culturally sensitive, compassionate drivers, able to provide assistance getting on and off the vehicle, as well as help with heavier items.
• Low-cost fares, either free or donations requested, but not required.

Appendix B: National Aging and Disability Transportation Center Focus Group Series Summary Report

Introduction and Context
To increase understanding of how transportation availability, affordability, and accessibility affects diverse individuals, the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) convened four sets of community focus groups this year. Hopelink’s Mobility Management team was happy to partner in this work to learn how diverse community members access practical transportation options.

The feedback summarized in this report will inform the work of the NADTC and the King County Mobility Coalition. These findings will strengthen advocacy efforts in the county for a connected and mobile community.

Summary Findings
In the following sections, this report summarizes each event and highlights the unique themes of each group.

While each focus group brought their unique perspective and had specific concerns, a handful of findings were repeated throughout the three events. Namely,

- Transportation options need to be easily discovered, affordable, and accessible.
- The current transportation system does not meet community needs. Due to lack of service, many trips are difficult if not impossible to complete. This includes few options in suburban and rural areas and limited options for cross-county or long-distance trips.
- Public Transit Operators must be equipped with training and tools to support diverse riders. This includes assisting people using mobility devices as they enter and exit the vehicle and cultural training to ensure the safety of all riders.

Diverse Older Adults Summary Findings
The focus group for older adults occurred on Wednesday, June 23, 2022, from 10:30AM to 12 PM. It was hosted on Zoom and had closed captioning as an accessibility accommodation. Ten participants joined
the call and shared their perspectives on transportation options and mobility in King County. The following sections summarize their feedback into general themes: barriers, ease, the impact of transportation cost, personal experience, and desired changes.

The participants noted significant barriers to using public transit and specialized options. Public transit was associated with long, inconvenient or off-schedule travel times. Participants reported few options on weekends and to other cities. They mentioned a desire for increased safety on public transit, including places to sit, time to find a seat before the vehicle begins moving, and improved lighting and shelter at transit stops.

Key Destinations
Participants were asked: where do you need and want to go? Responses ranged from everyday locations like grocery stores, the gym, senior centers, and work, to more specialized places such as healthcare centers, medical appointments, community events, and more spontaneous travel to meet a friend. Many participants travel in their neighborhoods rather than longer distances. Specific key destinations included the Seattle Center and the University of Washington campus.

When asked if there were any destinations the participants would like to go to but couldn't because of lack of transportation options, we heard participants mention travel to other cities, the Zoo in Tacoma, or museums in the area. When asked to elaborate on these difficulties, participants noted the time constraint of traveling on public transit combined with a dislike or inability to drive on freeways bars several participants from traveling far from their neighborhood.

Barriers
Participants were asked how easily do you feel you are able to get around in your community? What makes getting around difficult? They identified the following barriers:

- Lack of parking at their destination and the difficulty of parking in the city.
- Key destinations like food banks or senior centers not being on a bus route and therefore inaccessible.
- Increased gas prices have made frequent trips too expensive.
- Not enough weekend service available specifically for people to go to churches.
- Some services have been unavailable due to volunteer availability and COVID restrictions.
- Lack of knowledge about alternative services (Hyde Shuttle, Sound Generations, Community Van).
- Not being able to transfer for free from bus to light rail without an ORCA card.
- Time spent on public transportation and needing multiple transfers make some trips and destinations difficult because participants' schedules cannot fit with the travel time.
- Safety: many participants do not feel safe taking the bus in the evenings; the area is unsafe, bus stations are unsafe and are not equipped properly.
Ease

While answering the same question: *how easily do you feel you are able to get around in your community?* Participants shared their experience with transportation options.

- Hyde shuttle took me to physical therapy and medical appointments when I broke my arm and was unable to drive. It was great because I did not have to rely on friends or family to get to my appointments or visit friends. It was fantastic! One of the barriers I found was no weekend service.
- Sound Generations volunteer program helps with medical appointments.
- Periodic updates about services available for seniors in different areas such as senior centers.
- University district light rail station will ease the way I get around. (Overall, many participants said travel is not as easy as it could be.)
- Time spent in public transit. (Too many transfers combined with bus infrequency)
- Service reliability is essential; many participants noted recent service adjustments changed travel options.
- The central district [urban Seattle] is very convenient; however, if I need to get out of the central district, public transit no longer works for me.
- Eastside, Federal Way, and other cities out of Seattle, transportation options become less available.

Cost

Participants were asked: *How does the cost of transportation impact you and your ability to get where you need to go?* Overall themes from this topic centered on attempts to save money and reduce costs.

- Having a senior card helped me save money since I only pay a dollar when I get on the bus. Automating the card is very convenient because it took out of my head the need to reload my card, thinking I would not be able to catch the bus or next train.
- I can save money now using public transit since gas prices are so high.
- I have been using the public transportation system for a couple of months since my truck broke down. Sometimes you budget a dollar for transportation but getting there is more expensive. The cost increase affects my daily movement. I am working on fixing my truck.

Experience

We asked participants about their experiences while using public transportation and specialized transportation options. Participants were asked: *Have you ever been in a situation where you felt you have been treated differently while using transportation?* Many participants noted difficulty they associate with their age rather than other aspects of their identity like race, gender, or ethnicity.

- As a senior using the bus, it is difficult to get off the bus since the back door is taller than a regular step. Even to get in, if I do not tell the driver to lower the bus, I am not able to get in. It is hard to keep my balance on the bus when standing on the aisle and trying to reach the back door to deboard.
▪ We understand the policy to get out of the bus from the back door, but it is not inclusive for seniors. It is hard to walk on the bus while moving or get out of the bus without lowering it.

▪ Going through the back and the impatience of the younger generation to wait until we get to our seat or gently go out the back is tough.

**Changes**

To conclude, the focus group participants were asked *what transportation changes, specific improvements, or services you would you like to see in your community?* Many of these suggestions followed similar themes; increased intercity options, increased options for safely boarding and deboarding the bus, and more information about different options.

▪ Buses going to the UW are packed with students leaving little room for anyone else. A partnership with UW and Metro to have their own shuttles for students so people with a longer commute can sit.

▪ More low-cost services. More shuttles in the community.

▪ Home deliveries for seniors.

▪ Improve frequency and reliability.

▪ More upfront seats available for seniors, which allows seniors to better communicate with drivers and look ahead for their stop while deboarding from the front door.

▪ Improve the bus ticketing system to be more inclusive and welcoming.

▪ Multiple intercity routes, for example, Renton to Bellevue, Everett to Bellevue.

▪ Collaboration between cities to develop more public transportation options.

▪ Increase visual and volume on the bus so people with disabilities can be aware of their stops.

▪ More public education/campaign to let people know to give out seats to seniors.

▪ Increase safety in buses and bus stations.

**Diverse Young Adults with Disabilities Summary Findings**

The focus group for adults with disabilities occurred on Saturday, June 25, 2022, from 12:30 PM to 2 PM. It was hosted on Zoom and had closed captioning as an accessibility accommodation. Five participants joined the call and shared their perspectives on transportation options and mobility in King County. The following sections summarize their feedback into general themes: barriers, ease, the impact of transportation cost, personal experience, and desired changes.

The participants noted significant barriers to services and undertrained operators. Participants highlighted a desire for cross-county travel, convenient options, and the freedom to move around spontaneously.
Key Destinations
Participants were asked: *where do you need and want to go?* Responses ranged from everyday locations like school and work and grocery stores to more specialized locations such as travel to meet a friend or attend church. Like the focus group with older adults, many participants said they often travel in their own neighborhoods rather than longer distances.

We once again heard about the difficulties of traveling to other cities when asked if there were any destinations the participants would like to go to but can't because of few transportation options. Participants who use paratransit services noted the difficulty of scheduling a cross-county trip.

Barriers
Participants were asked *how easily do you feel you are able to get around in your community? What makes getting around difficult?* They identified the following barriers:

- Cross-county transportation
- It is too challenging to go to parks, businesses, or other destinations in other counties.
- The wait time for cross-county transportation is too long.
- Out-of-county transfer is extremely difficult. It's a two or three-step process taking too much time.
- Sidewalks and construction create obstacles for people in wheelchairs.
- Plants being overgrown blocks sidewalks.
- It seems cities create some of these obstacles by not maintaining sidewalks.

Ease
While answering the same question: *how easily do you feel you are able to get around in your community?* Participants did not have much to share, noting many aspects of transportation for people with disabilities require pre-scheduling and enrollment, making them difficult. One participant did note bus and train services are helpful options but are not universally available.

Cost
Participants were asked: *How does the cost of transportation impact you and your ability to get where you need to go?* Overall themes from this topic centered on attempts to save money and reduce costs.

- When services are late or canceled, it costs money. Sometimes participants must rely on Uber or Lyft to reach destinations when other services unexpectedly cannot help.
- Using on-demand services increases the cost for people with disabilities. The lack of ADA services adds a cost burden.
- Taxi (Yellow Cab) is too expensive - $60+.
- The cost difference between counties differs, making budgeting harder.
- Many attendees do not receive assistance with costs.
- Moving is costly, and transportation in the new location must be considered for livability.
Experience
We asked participants about their experiences while using public transportation and specialized transportation options. Participants were asked: *Have you ever been in a situation where you felt you have been treated differently while using transportation?* Many participants noted difficulty they associate with their disability, or rather, people’s perception of their disability. Other participants reported negative behavior from operators or riders because of their disability, ethnicity, and gender.

- One participant was told by a transportation company they "did not have to take him" to their destination. This participant felt this was because of their wheelchair.
- A participant shared they were made to feel as though their presence on the bus was unwelcome because securing their powerchair "took too much time."
- Many participants experienced stress and anxiety when services were late. One participant felt their concerns were dismissed because of their gender.
- Many participants noted experiences where operators (drivers) were rude or dismissive. This is true for for-profit services and public ones. Many participants expressed a desire for better training for drivers.
- One participant was mocked by fellow riders for not being able to speak and did not feel safe during the trip.

Changes
To conclude, the focus group participants were asked *what transportation changes, specific improvements, or services you would like to see in your community?* Many of these suggestions followed similar themes, especially in the barriers section; increased inter-city and inter-county options, increased options requiring less scheduling lead time, and a desire for accessible infrastructure.

- Want destinations to be more accessible. Cities should create infrastructure accessible to everyone.
- Improved wayfinding.
- Simplified cross-county options and transfers between systems – especially paratransit.
- Want to see changes to paratransit services. Participants expressed a desire for a more accessible and readily available (on-demand) service.

Diverse Caregivers Summary Findings
The focus group for caregivers of diverse adults with disabilities and older adults occurred on Saturday, June 25, 2022, from 2:30 PM to 4PM. It was hosted on Zoom and had closed captioning as an accessibility accommodation. Seven participants joined the call and shared their perspectives on transportation options and mobility in King County. The following sections summarize their feedback into general themes: barriers, ease, the impact of transportation cost, personal experience, and desired changes.

The participants noted significant barriers and few options available to the people they cared for. Transportation largely fell into their responsibility; if the caregiver was unavailable, the person they
cared for could not complete necessary trips. Participants highlighted this reliant system causes feelings of isolation and burden for the people they care for. The participants in this focus group were primarily available for non-emergency medical transportation trips for their clients – leaving a significant gap for other types of travel.

Key Destinations
Participants were asked: where do the people you care for need and want to go? Responses ranged from everyday locations like grocery stores and community centers to more specialized places such as medical care or church attendance.

Somewhat unique to this focus group, when asked about available services and which ones their clients used, we heard from participants about the difficulties of traveling for people who require additional assistance getting in and out of vehicles or who travel with a walker or wheelchair, and other mobility devices. Participants noted the difficulty of using private services like taxis or Uber and Lyft, where the capabilities of each vehicle vary greatly. These difficulties bar many caregiving clients from traveling generally rather than from specific destinations.

Many participants’ clients used specialized transportation options like Medicaid Transportation or non-profit shuttles. Public transportation was mentioned as an option for some, but difficulty or fear in accessing public transit removed its viability. Overwhelmingly, participants noted they were the primary transportation resource for many of their clients; without them, their clients would not be able to get to where they need to go.

Destinations
- Church
- Senior centers, planned activities
- Medical appointments
- Parks

Transportation Options
- Available options are not suitable for them at the moment.
- I’m a caregiver for an elderly lady – she gets scared using public transportation, especially since COVID, and sometimes that's her only available option.
- There is no public transport where my mother lives. There's only Uber or me driving her. She is elderly and doesn’t use technology. Scared to call a taxi. I work all week, so I can't drive her, and she can't leave her house. No public transportation by her home.
- Planned specialized services like Medicaid transportation or even Uber and Lyft are sometimes canceled or not accessible.
- Many private services are not accessible. If using a walker or non-foldable wheelchair, it is hard to use those options.
Due to too much traffic, accessibility is limited, and most clients arrive late.

**Barriers**

Participants were asked - *how easily do you feel the people you care for are able to get around in their community? Are there places they would like to go but can't because of lack of transportation? What makes getting around difficult?* Responses echoed similar themes from the previous question. Many clients' dependency on a small group of caregivers or specialized services limits the type of trips they can complete.

- Everywhere. She used to live with me for half the week before COVID. She used to travel everywhere. But since COVID, she stays in her condominium. No buses, so she can't leave. No other family in the area.
- They can use Uber if they have the funds, and access to the train. There's never been an instance where there isn't a way for them to get there.
- The client has breathing issues. Scared to be around a lot of people. With cancer – can't be around other people. So, she stays local. She'd rather go where there are not a lot of people.
- Loves to visit her friend in other cities, but most times, the cost of transportation hinders them from it.

**Options Lack Ease**

While answering the question: *how easily do you feel you are able to get around in your community?* Many difficulties were attributed to older age and decreased personal mobility. Like previous focus groups, this question resulted in the identification of several barriers and challenges.

- Transportation cost. Both public transit and private are too costly, but most notably, private options are incredibly expensive.
- Access issues and how big the car is but also awareness of the need to transport a person with disabilities.
- Private vehicles are smaller with smaller trunks. Many operators of these smaller options do not know how to fold a walker or chair, can't fold them, or don't want to. This is true for several types of mobility devices. Not just wheelchairs and walkers, but crutches as well.
- The client has limited options and complains about not having the strength to move.
- Older adults can no longer spend much time in traffic; longer trips are challenging.
- Even if there were public transportation options, other barriers include (1) fear of being attacked (anti-Asian violence against elderly women), (2) old age so fear of falling, and (3) fear of germs/COVID.
- I always want my client to feel comfortable; I always have water. She drinks it from time to time after walking.
Cost
Participants were asked: *How does the cost of transportation affect the people you care for and their ability to get where they need to go?* Overall themes from this topic centered on the caregiver’s limitations in providing transportation; they are often the only affordable or available option but are limited in how many trips they can provide. The cost of private services again rose as a barrier.

- The cost has hindered them from going where they need to go. The cost of using Uber has increased a lot. Clients can no longer afford it. They usually don’t want to use the bus, so a taxi/Uber is the only option.
- Some clients have signed up for Medicaid Transportation, brokered by Hopelink.
- Individual providers are refunded mileage if they transported the client, but they’re limited in the miles – it depends on what the client has. The limitations are dictated by the responsible party to pay (insurance).
- My clients know how many hours I can work. Sometimes they ask for transportation rides technically outside of my hours. I just do it. I was called by my client to pick her up from the hospital. Like 10 PM. So, I had to drive from Federal Way to Montlake. Way more than 50 miles. **Sometimes we just do it because they have only us.** If they call you, they have you. If you don’t go, what’s going to happen? Caregivers are just serving. Sometimes I don’t remember the miles, and I just do it.
- The cost itself is fine. Senior fares for buses and light rail are very generous, but the person I care for can’t use these things anymore. Access to options is difficult. We tried to use the smaller buses (for the elderly). It was so complicated we couldn’t figure it out. She doesn’t speak English. I speak English, and I couldn’t figure it out. We gave up.
- Gas prices are high, making transportation costs high, and some care facilities and homes have cut down on activities.

Experience
We asked participants about their experiences while using public transportation and specialized transportation options. Participants were asked: *Have you ever been in a situation where you felt you have been treated differently while using transportation?* Many participants noted difficulty they associate with their race and ethnicity, whether this was because of discriminatory treatment or fear of violence.

- I felt discriminated against because I’m a black African. The people I care for are white. There was a situation where we sat on a bus. Someone asked, "why do you have black guy care for you?" It didn’t sit well with me.
- In California, I used buses. Many of my clients are white. People are looking at me and holding their noses. People stand up and move away. Have not experienced it here. But felt so bad.
- I haven’t had this experience, but I wouldn’t want to because it could damage my mental health.
Changes
To conclude, the focus group participants were asked *what transportation changes, specific improvements, or services would you like to see in your community?* Many of these suggestions followed similar themes, especially in the barriers section; increased options and easy-to-find options. Choices must be affordable and available for everyone in many different neighborhoods.

- I don't know what options are available. What would work for my clients? If I knew there were so many kinds, then I could use those resources for my clients.
- It is hard to know everything available for specific populations.
- We need a cheaper and easier transportation system. Not just for older folks but everyone in general.
- The only way we can go through fear is to face it. We build relationships with our clients. They trust us. We build a relationship to the point of bringing them back into the community. We have to be in the community to know it’s safe out there. If there’s a transportation system we want them to use, we have to show them. We need to walk with them. It’s OK to be out in the community. They need to know it’s OK.
- I think more mileage for those doing individual providing.
- Services need to be available for community members in the language they speak.
- More services throughout the week and day. Weekends, mid-mornings; people need options!