



King County **MOBILITY**COALITION

Stories Shape Systems

Transportation is more than a way to get from place to place—it is essential to health, opportunity, and community connection.



Access to Health and Wellbeing StoryMap Project

The **Access to Health and Wellbeing Workgroup**, a program of the **King County Mobility Coalition (KCMC)**, is developing this interactive StoryMap that highlights the real transportation challenges community members face when accessing healthcare and other essential services throughout the region.

This project centers the lived experiences of people who encounter the greatest barriers to meeting their transportation needs. Through personal stories, we aim to better understand both the successes and challenges individuals experience when traveling to medical appointments, wellness services, and other destinations that support healthy, independent lives.

The StoryMap will feature stories from across King County and surrounding areas, demonstrating how transportation gaps can affect access to healthcare and other social determinants of health. These stories illustrate issues such as:

- Traveling long distances across county lines to receive medical care
- Transportation barriers following procedures that involve sedation or anesthesia
- Limited first-mile and last-mile connections when using public transit
- Transportation challenges in rural and underserved communities
- Difficulties traveling with critical medical equipment, such as oxygen tanks
- Accessing Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities
- The impacts of state and federal transportation funding decisions on healthcare access

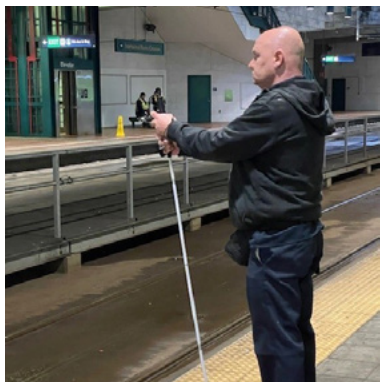
By combining personal experiences with transportation and health access data, this project seeks to humanize the challenges behind the statistics and provide decision-makers with a deeper understanding of community needs. The findings will help inform policies, programs, and investments that support more equitable, coordinated, and accessible transportation systems.

Through elevating the voices of community members, we hope to drive meaningful improvements in mobility, healthcare access, and overall wellbeing throughout the region.

For questions or feedback about the project, please contact:

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Chris waiting for a train.

CHRIS

Chris is a deafblind individual whose transportation experience is closely tied to his independence, employment, and desire to live a full, active life. Born with sight and later losing it due to retinitis pigmentosa, he built a strong early career as a mechanic before eventually traveling across the U.S. to find a place where he could continue working meaningfully. After exploring options in almost every state, he ultimately found stable employment making aircraft parts and built his life in Washington.

Transportation became essential—and complex—once his vision changed. Early commutes involved learning how to navigate buses, ferries, and trains using orientation and mobility training. This included cane skills, memorizing routes, and learning how to move between systems. The journeys were often long and required careful coordination, especially when connecting rural areas with limited transit options.

Communication on transit was initially a major barrier. Without easy access to spoken information as a Deaf person with vision loss, Chris relied on tactile methods such as Braille-labeled Communication cards, print-on-palm communication with transit operators, and later Braille displays connected to mobile technology. Over time, these tools, along with GPS and a handheld vibration-based secondary mobility device, significantly improved his ability to travel.

“In rural settings especially, simply reaching a transit stop can require extra planning or assistance due to terrain and distance.”

Even with these supports, gaps remain. Quarterly transit schedule updates and weekend service reductions, rural “first mile/last mile” challenges, and inconsistent coordination between transit systems can make trips unpredictable or incomplete. In rural settings especially, simply reaching a transit stop can require extra planning or assistance due to terrain and distance.

Chris lives on a rural property in Enumclaw, where there are no sidewalks, uneven terrain, and no direct access to transit. Unable to independently reach the closest bus stop, special negotiation with transit resources has been required to bridge the “first mile.” Using a cane, a Mini-guide that vibrates to indicate the presence of obstacles, and careful memorization of landmarks, he makes his way across rough ground to the edge of his property to an agreed upon pickup point.

Overall, Chris has experienced meaningful improvements in accessibility. Ferry and rail systems have added tactile wayfinding, Braille signage, and clearer boarding processes. He also benefits from staff who understand how to communicate and assist in ways that respect his independence.

Beyond his personal travel, Chris has contributed directly to improving transportation systems through advisory work. His lived experience has helped shape accessibility upgrades such as tactile navigation features, improved station design, and safer pedestrian crossings through the installation of vibrating Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS).

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Chris' story reflects a transportation journey shaped by both progress and persistent gaps—where independence is made possible through a combination of personal skill, adaptive technology, and evolving system accessibility. He continues to be an extraordinarily strong advocate for transportation systems that would close those first/last-mile gaps and provide consistent accessible service, so others like him can connect to community, employment and social experiences. ■



Samuel.

SAMUEL

Samuel, an aspiring sci-fi writer, relies heavily on public transportation to navigate life across the Puget Sound region, where he lives and works. For him, buses are more than a convenience, they are a lifeline to work, community, and essential healthcare through the VA. Samuel has lived in Seattle, Tacoma, Federal Way, and Puyallup. He says that using the bus system in each place is a little different and it takes some time to learn. But the bus is usually on time and reliable. "Every now and then, they are a little late. One time I was coming from work in Seattle, I was working at a security company, and road

construction forced the driver to take an unfamiliar turn and he got lost. He had to get help from the passengers. It was an interesting experience. He was able to get us back on track, but it took a solid 10 minutes. When the route is not the way it is expected to be, it is really disappointing and frustrating to say the least."

Transportation plays a critical role in Samuel's access to medical care. He often travels from Pierce County to Seattle for VA appointments, combining help from family with bus routes to reach his destination. Still, the cost of transit can be a barrier. He has missed out on vital veteran stand-down events, which offer free healthcare, clothing, and many other resources, simply because he could not afford the travel expenses. "It is not only difficult to take the time and get there, it's hard to just get there, period."

"It is not only difficult to take the time and get there, it's hard to just get there, period."

Samuel also faces challenges that are less visible. Managing his mental health can make navigating transit more difficult, leading to missed buses or wrong stops. Despite these barriers, he remains grateful for public transportation and uses tools like Google Maps to stay on track. He hopes for improvements, including cleaner buses and more affordable, flexible rideshare options. His story highlights how essential, yet fragile, transportation access can be for people with disabilities, especially when those challenges are not immediately seen. ■



Barbara at a bus stop in Shoreline without a shelter or bench.

BARBARA

Barbara and her husband, Jack, moved to Seattle to be closer to their daughter and grandchildren. Transportation quickly became central to their lives because of Jack's serious medical needs. After complications from diabetes led to the amputation of part of his foot, getting safely to healthcare appointments became much harder. Before surgery, regular public transit generally worked for them. But afterward, walking to and from bus stops became difficult and sometimes unsafe. Although they technically live near transit routes, Barbara describes a major gap between being "close to transit" and actually being able to use it safely when

someone has limited mobility, balance issues, or post-surgical restrictions. Jack now struggles with walking longer distances and is prone to stumbling because of neuropathy and the loss of part of his foot. Medical recovery periods, especially after procedures involving sedation, make transportation even more challenging. Barbara believes greater flexibility could be built into paratransit eligibility requirements for people recovering from surgeries or dealing with changing or intermittent medical conditions.

"Medical recovery periods, especially after procedures involving sedation, make transportation even more challenging."

Transportation barriers have also shaped the healthcare decisions they make. They often select medical providers based on which locations are easiest to reach by bus rather than which doctors best meet Jack's needs. Some specialized care simply feels inaccessible because of the transportation required to get there.

Even when transit is available, the process can be exhausting. Medical trips often involve long travel times, transfers, waiting, and additional walking. Barbara accompanies Jack to appointments because he is beginning to experience memory issues and can become disoriented. When Barbara herself is unwell, the responsibility of managing transportation becomes even more stressful.

Cost is another major barrier. Living on a fixed Social Security income means transportation expenses quickly add up, especially for frequent medical appointments. Longer appointments can require paying additional fares because transfer windows expire before the return trip. Occasional reliance on more expensive transportation options can strain their monthly budget and force difficult financial tradeoffs.

Transportation challenges also affect everyday life. Sometimes Jack cannot manage the trip to the grocery store, leaving Barbara to shop alone while worrying about leaving him at home. The constant planning and coordination create ongoing stress and anxiety.

Barbara believes transportation systems work best when they recognize individual circumstances and provide flexibility for real-life medical needs. For her, reliable transportation is not just about getting from place to place — it affects healthcare access, caregiving, financial stability, independence, and quality of life. ■



Beau and his dog, Mellow on a camping trip together.

BEAU AND MELLOW

Beau is 33 and has lived with Type 1 diabetes since he was four. At 29, he became legally blind. Today he's a motivational speaker, health and mindset coach, diabetes advocate, and small business owner who works with dogs. "I love everything that I do," he says. His message is about finding strength through diabetes. "As harsh as it can be, it can also be a positive tool if you respect it and educate yourself." But transportation has become one of the biggest barriers in his life.

As Beau's speaking career grows, so do the challenges of getting to events. "Every time I see an opportunity I want to accept, it's a struggle," he explains. Most engagements require early arrivals and long days, which means relying on someone else to drive him. "It's a lot to ask someone to drop you off, pick you up, and wait around an eight-hour event." Sometimes a friend can help, but he knows he can't keep asking.

For everyday needs, Beau has figured out the bus system. He knows which routes take him to medical appointments, the grocery store, or the pharmacy. "Day-to-day things I can manage," he says. "I've learned the routines."

The real barrier is getting beyond those routines, especially when it comes to the outdoors.

"For my mental health, I need nature," Beau says. "I love fishing." But places like Snoqualmie or many good camping spots are out of reach without a car. Getting there means asking someone to drive hours just to drop him off and return later.

"By the time you add it all up, someone might spend six to eight hours on the road just so I can camp for a weekend. It's stressful enough that sometimes I almost don't want to go."

That loss of freedom weighs on him. "We all need our escapes. When I realize I can't get somewhere I want to go – fishing or camping – it makes me feel stuck." One camping trip last year reminded him what that freedom felt like. For five days it was just Beau and his dog, Mellow. They fished near the campsite and explored the area together.

"That was probably the only time since losing my vision that I felt true freedom," he says. If I could, I'd go fishing every other weekend." Instead, Beau might get there five times a year. "It shouldn't be this hard to get to the places that help keep you healthy." ■

"It's a lot to ask someone to drop you off, pick you up, and wait around an eight-hour event."



Parvathi.

PARVATHI

Transportation has shaped Parvathi's life in meaningful ways for decades. Her story begins in India in the early 1970s, when a delayed bus unexpectedly led her to meet the man who would become her husband. She was anxiously waiting for a bus to work when a young man on a scooter stopped and offered her a ride. That chance encounter became the beginning of a lifelong partnership. Years later, after living and working abroad with her husband, he suddenly passed. Parvathi began experiencing health challenges of her own. So, she moved to the Seattle area to be near her only son. Moving closer to family brought support, but it also

introduced new transportation barriers. Without a car and unable to drive, she initially felt isolated and dependent on others for rides.

Living in downtown Kirkland helped because some community resources were nearby, but transportation still determined how connected and independent she could be. Wanting to stay active and engaged, she began visiting community centers where she slowly built friendships and learned about transportation options available to older adults and people with mobility limitations.

Being able to use door-to-door and fixed route transportation services became life changing for Parvathi. It allowed her to travel independently without relying on her son for every ride. For someone who values staying active, volunteering, shopping, exercising, and participating in community life, transportation opened the door to connection and independence.

At the same time, Parvathi saw how transportation gaps affected many older adults in her community. Many seniors she met did not drive and depended entirely on family members to take them places. She began helping others learn about available transit options so they would not feel isolated or stuck at home.

“Being able to use door-to-door and fixed route transportation services became life changing for Parvathi.”

Parvathi learned to navigate multiple forms of public transportation, including buses, shuttles, and rail service. But she notes that some transportation programs still have barriers that can make access difficult, especially for seniors. Strict eligibility requirements, long wait times when booking rides, the need to schedule trips several days in advance, and occasional last-minute cancellations can make it harder for people to plan daily activities or appointments. For people with medical needs or limited flexibility, these gaps can create stress and uncertainty.

Transportation became even more critical when her son experienced a major stroke in 2020. After months in the hospital, he returned home unable to walk independently, speak clearly, or manage daily activities on his own. Suddenly, Parvathi became his full-time caregiver while also needing to coordinate travel to constant medical appointments, therapies, and follow-up care.

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Parvathi's in-depth knowledge of available transportation options made it possible for her son to receive the rehabilitation and medical support he needed. Without accessible transportation, Parvathi says both of them would have become cut off from healthcare, services, and community life at a time when support mattered most.

Today, transportation services remain central to Parvathi's independence and quality of life. It allows her to volunteer at the hospital, attend exercise classes, participate in community programs, and maintain social connections. She describes public transportation not only as a way to travel, but as a bridge to community, friendship, healthcare, and purpose.

For Parvathi, transportation is deeply connected to dignity and belonging. Her experience shows that when reliable and accessible transportation is available, older adults and caregivers are better able to stay engaged, care for loved ones, and remain active members of their communities. Parvathi's story highlights the importance of flexible, accessible, same-day transportation options for seniors and people with disabilities. Parvathi is successful in using the existing transportation network. Same-day transportation and less cumbersome eligibility applications would improve community connections for her and others like her. ■



Jeff stands with his guide dog, Jimbo, at a bus stop without shelter or seating that he frequents near his home.

JEFF AND JIMBO

Jeff is a frequent transit rider who is blind and travels with his guide dog, Jimbo. Public transportation gives him independence and allows him to participate in daily life, from attending appointments and visiting family to participating in writing groups and community activities. Many of his experiences are positive. And, he also knows how stressful travel can become when systems are not designed with accessibility in mind. For Jeff, the most difficult part of transportation is often the “first mile” and “last mile” — the parts of the trip that happen before boarding or after getting off transit. Crossing busy streets, navigating confusing building entrances, waiting outside for pickups, and finding the right pickup location can all create anxiety and uncertainty. Even when the transit ride itself goes smoothly, simply getting safely to the stop or destination can be exhausting.

Jeff described times when ride pickups were delayed, leaving him waiting outside after dark or standing on busy streets for long periods. On another occasion, a third party contracted vehicle replaced the usual paratransit shuttle. The driver tried signaling him visually from across the street, unaware that Jeff could not see the flashing lights. Experiences like these made him feel that better communication and training could significantly improve travel for people with disabilities.

One particularly stressful experience occurred while traveling across the region to visit his daughter. After transferring between multiple buses, unexpected route changes and confusion about stops left him stranded in an unfamiliar downtown area. He relied on strangers for directions and eventually had to call his wife for help getting home. The experience was so overwhelming that he has not attempted that trip again since.

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He also shared how difficult unfamiliar environments can be. At a medical center, crossing from the bus stop to the entrance required navigating a busy intersection with audible crossing signals that were hard to interpret amid traffic noise. At another location, unusual building architecture confused both Jeff and his guide dog, briefly trapping them in an awkward corner. Temporary sidewalk obstructions have also created hazards during routine trips. And, at a stop that he frequents near his home, there is no shelter or bench making wait times in adverse weather conditions difficult.

Because of these challenges, Jeff spends a great deal of time planning his routes in advance. He carefully studies transit schedules and maps and uses navigation tools to understand where buses stop and how to move through unfamiliar areas. Planning ahead helps him maintain confidence and independence.

Despite difficult moments, Jeff also described many positive experiences. He appreciates drivers who communicate clearly, offer small but meaningful guidance, or understand accessibility needs. Simple actions — such as letting him know where open seats are located — can make a major difference. He recalled a particularly positive experience in Oregon, where transit staff were highly familiar with guide dog users and proactively helped riders feel comfortable and safe.

Looking ahead, Jeff imagines a future transportation system that combines accessible transit with autonomous vehicles providing seamless door-to-door service. At the same time, he notes that these systems would need thoughtful design to work effectively for people with disabilities, including clear ways to locate vehicles and safely board them independently.

At the heart of Jeff's story are two key themes. First, transportation should feel less stressful. Reducing uncertainty, improving communication, and making environments easier to navigate would encourage more people to use transit confidently. Second, consistent accessibility education and training for transportation staff could greatly improve riders' experiences. Jeff's experiences show that even small actions and thoughtful communication can make travel feel safer, more welcoming, and more empowering. ■

"For Jeff, the most difficult part of transportation is often the 'first mile' and 'last mile' — the parts of the trip that happen before boarding or after getting off transit."



Elizabeth volunteers in support of affordable housing like the historic Jensen Block.

ELIZABETH A

ELIZABETH A, a low-income senior living in South Lake Union, has relied on public transportation for most of her life in Seattle. For years, fixed-route transit allowed her to stay connected to her community, attend appointments, and participate in volunteer work. However, after a hip injury and developing arthritis, her mobility has significantly declined, making transportation much more difficult.

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"I've lived in Seattle my entire life. I graduated from the University of Washington with two master's degrees. For the most part, King County has a robust transportation system. Before my health and mobility issues, I was able to travel on a bus for grocery shopping, doctor's appointments, seeing family, volunteer activities and fun. However, now with mobility issues, I have a very difficult time using buses for even the most basic errands, such as groceries and doctor's appointments."

"With mobility issues, I have a very difficult time using buses for even the most basic errands, such as groceries and doctor's appointments."

Today, even reaching the nearest bus stop presents a challenge. Elizabeth must walk five to six blocks, navigating steep hills and uneven conditions, which can cause severe pain and increase her risk of falling. In some cases, buses do not align with the curb, forcing her to step down unsafely. As a result, she limits her trips to only essential errands and has even canceled medical appointments when the journey feels too difficult. The cost of alternatives, like taxis, is often prohibitive.

Transportation impediments have also affected her ability to stay engaged in her community. She has missed volunteer opportunities, social events, and civic activities because traveling, especially at night, feels unsafe or unmanageable. Elizabeth

believes that more accessible transit options, such as closer bus stops or flexible services like dial a ride, would make a meaningful difference.

For Elizabeth, transportation is directly tied to independence. Without reliable and accessible options, daily life becomes increasingly restricted. Her experience highlights how gaps in the system can turn a well-connected city into a transit desert for people with mobility challenges, especially as the population continues to age. ■



Kathy and her friends waiting for a scheduled deviation.

KATHY

Kathy is a 78-year-old Bellevue resident who has lived in the same home in the Enatai neighborhood for more than fifty years. She and her husband built an active life around walking, hiking, and using public transportation to stay connected to their community. Even after retiring, she continued to rely on the bus system to reach the library, grocery stores, medical appointments, and cultural events in Bellevue and Seattle.

That changed in August 2025 when the only bus route serving her neighborhood was removed.

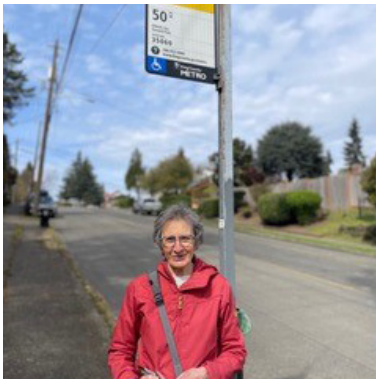
For decades, the bus ran along her street, providing a reliable and affordable way to travel. With a senior pass, she could ride for one dollar and avoid the stress of driving, which has become more difficult due to vision issues and reduced confidence behind the wheel. Now, the nearest transit options are about three quarters of a mile away and require a long walk, including a steep staircase, which is not always manageable, especially in poor weather or when carrying groceries.

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The replacement service offers scheduled pick-ups through requested off route deviations, providing riders with an alternative transportation option. For Kathy, however, arranging these deviations has required some adjustment. Scheduling trips involves planning ahead, navigating wait times on the phone and some uncertainty about return-trip arrangements due to advance notice requirements. While the service has helped maintain access to transportation, additional planning and limited availability have made it feel less convenient than the consistent fixed-route service she previously relied on. Without accessible and convenient transit, Kathy and others in her neighborhood feel increasingly isolated. Simple routines like visiting the library, meeting friends, or attending community events have become difficult or impossible. She worries especially about neighbors who no longer drive, noting, “I have friends in the neighborhood who are literally stranded now.”

“Without accessible and convenient transit, Kathy and others in her neighborhood feel increasingly isolated.”

Kathy is not asking for something new, but for the restoration of a consistent fixed-route bus service to Enatai. She believes access to consistent public transportation is essential for seniors to remain independent, active, and connected to the communities they have long called home. ■



Beth stands at her local bus stop without shelter or seating.

BETH

For Beth, getting around Seattle is no longer about knowing the system; it's about whether the system works for her. A lifelong Seattleite in her 80s, Beth is well versed in public transportation. She lives near a fixed route bus in Southeast Seattle and understands how to navigate buses and light rail. But despite that knowledge, each trip feels somewhat uncertain and sometimes exhausting. Beth is doing her best to live an independent life despite health challenges, including arthritis and vision and hearing impairments, which make travel physically demanding.

What should be a short trip, like a five-mile ride to a medical appointment, can take up to 90 minutes on transit. Reaching care often requires multiple transfers, long waits, and crossing busy streets like MLK Way, where timing and safety are constant concerns. As a result, “I often miss my connection,” she says.

Even routine trips for groceries or errands can take hours. Carrying bags, standing in the rain without shelter, and navigating the alignment of transfers make simple outings feel like endurance tests. On days when she doesn't feel strong enough, Beth cancels appointments, sometimes delaying care for months.

“Dimly lit stations and unpredictable behavior on buses leave her feeling vulnerable.”

Safety is another constant worry. Dimly lit stations and unpredictable behavior on buses leave her feeling vulnerable. “Will I become a victim?” she wonders.

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These challenges extend beyond basic needs. Beth often avoids community meetings, and cultural activities because getting there and back feels too risky or complicated. Even services meant to help, like paratransit services or volunteer driver programs, require advanced scheduling that doesn't reflect the reality of living with a disability.

For Beth, the issue isn't a lack of options, it's a lack of flexible services and safe connections. Without a system that consistently links people to where they need to go, even the most knowledgeable riders can find themselves left behind. ■



Mandy stands at her local bus stop.

MANDY

For Mandy, transportation is the key to connection. Without it, the community she values becomes just out of reach. Mandy doesn't drive because of her history with seizures, challenges with reaction time, and lack of peripheral vision on her left side. As a peer support specialist who helps others navigate systems and live independently, Mandy understands transportation deeply. She relies on it not only for work and daily needs, but also for the things that bring her joy, like singing with Redmond Chorale and attending community events. As she explains, "without public transportation or carpools, I could not access my chorus rehearsals." But getting there is rarely simple.

Mandy lives near the edge of Redmond and Bellevue, where transit exists but isn't always consistent or accessible. Reaching destinations often means piecing together multiple services such as Metro Flex, light rail, and sometimes ride-hailing. When one piece doesn't work, the whole trip can fall apart. Recently, difficulty boarding a new micro-transit shuttle forced her to change plans and pay for a Lyft instead.

Even when routes are available, timing and frequency create stress. A single missed bus can mean waiting 30 minutes, often in the dark or in the rain. For evening activities like weekly chorus rehearsals, uncertainty can be enough to make the trip feel risky. As Mandy puts it, "transit is limited, and every trip requires careful planning and backup options."

Relationships with drivers can make a difference. When drivers know her and understand her needs, the experience feels more reliable and supportive. But those relationships take time, and not all drivers are trained to provide the help riders may need.

Mandy plans her life around transportation. She chooses where to live based on proximity to transit and carefully maps out each trip. Still, many gaps remain.

For Mandy, and the people she works with, this is about more than inconvenience. When service is inconsistent, community events, creative outlets, and social connections become harder to reach, leaving people feeling isolated in the very places they call home. ■

"Even when routes are available, timing and frequency create stress. A single missed bus can mean waiting 30 minutes, often in the dark or in the rain."



Jerry waits at a bus stop with shelter and seating.

JERRY

Jerry moved to Seattle from Los Angeles, and transportation was one of his first challenges. The city's layout felt confusing. He explained "North did not seem like true north and east leaned more northeast. With roads winding around lakes and hills, Seattle felt like it was built into a forest". At first, he relied heavily on his phone just to get his bearings, which made getting around feel complicated. Things improved once he found stable housing through a veteran program about five months ago. Before that, he was moving frequently and feeling the strain of high rent. He even considered buying a motorcycle to make transportation

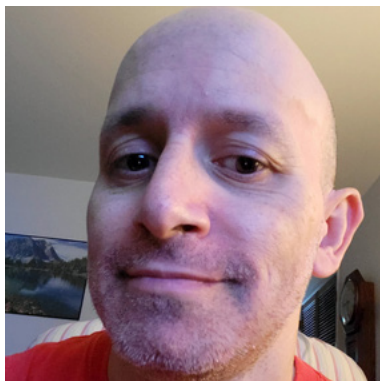
easier but quickly realized that it would not work well in Seattle's weather. With a permanent place to live, he was able to learn and rely on the transit system. Now, Jerry gets around effectively using buses and the Link light rail. He describes Link as one of the best parts of the system because it is reliable and gets him where he needs to go quickly. Compared to Los Angeles, he finds Seattle's transit faster and much more pleasant. In LA, bus rides often felt tense, with people arguing and drivers dealing with a lot. In contrast, Jerry notices that Seattle riders tend to be quiet and respectful, and drivers are courteous and willing to give directions.

Jerry uses both an ORCA card and a senior reduced fare permit, which makes transportation affordable. He can easily load money onto his card and stretch it over time. Transit allows him to reach stores, medical appointments, and other essential services.

"Some job opportunities are in areas not served by transit, forcing him to turn them down."

A retired Air Force veteran who worked on electrical systems and radar technology in aircraft, Jerry now looks for temporary work. However, transportation can still be a barrier. Some job opportunities are in areas not served by transit, forcing him to turn them down.

Overall, Jerry believes there is not much to complain about. Transit is affordable, dependable, and respectful. His only suggestion is for more bus shelters to help protect riders from the weather. ■



Aaron.

AARON

"Transportation is the cornerstone of opening so many doors and avenues. It allows me to go to social events, gets me to doctor's appointments, and so many other essential services. It's everything." Aaron lives in unincorporated Snohomish County and does not drive. Accessing medical care across county lines is one of his biggest transportation challenges. When Aaron lived in Issaquah (King County), he used Access paratransit and fixed-route buses together, often relying on paratransit for the "last mile" which he says is often the hardest part of the trip.

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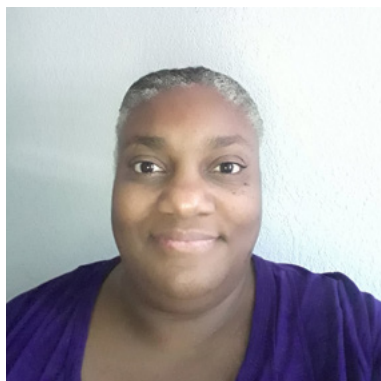
Having both systems within one county allowed flexibility and independence. After moving to Snohomish County, Access no longer serves him. He now relies on Homage transportation, which requires rides to be scheduled at least two days in advance. While reliable, the system lacks flexibility particularly for urgent or same-day needs, which requires him to depend on family or friends.

"I always have to ask someone to pick up my medication because I don't drive and there are no transportation options. That makes me completely dependent on others, which is frustrating. You have to get comfortable asking for help or you end up isolated. Transportation has a huge impact."

"Transportation is the cornerstone of opening so many doors and avenues."

For medical appointments in King County, Homage can take him across county lines but must return him to his original pickup location. They cannot drop him at additional destinations, limiting his ability to combine trips with visits to a friend's home or a grocery store. Because systems are county-based and not integrated, he must carefully coordinate schedules and often rely on family as backup. Appointment delays create further stress, as he risks missing return rides. Aaron has had to advocate with medical providers to schedule visits at times that align with transportation windows.

"Homage is a lifeline. They're a lifeline service. They're doing what they're intended to do. It's a lifeline service for people who, really, that's their only option. And without them, you'd become socially isolated, you wouldn't get to your appointments. And what does that do, over time? That that takes a total on your health. So, that is a lifeline." ■



Angelia

ANGELIA

For Angelia, lack of transportation is the barrier between staying connected to opportunity, and being stuck in place. Originally from Louisiana, Angelia now lives at Camp United We Stand in rural Woodinville with her two sons. She's actively trying to find work but, in addition to lack of transportation, her health challenges make that difficult. Arthritis in her knees limits how long she can stand or how far she can walk, and chronic kidney disease requires regular visits to her doctor. She's searching for employment that isn't physically demanding, but getting there is the first hurdle.

"I do have a car," she says, "but it needs expensive repairs."

Owning a car is costly, and while others at Camp United are helping where they can, most residents are in the same situation. Out of several vehicles at camp, only one is currently operational. Without a working car, Angelia depends on transit that only runs during peak weekday commute hours.

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“Without a working car, Angelia depends on transit that only runs during peak weekday commute hours.”

The challenges extend beyond access and into healthcare. Her primary care doctor is in Fremont, while her kidney specialist is in Mountlake Terrace, two locations that require multiple buses and careful timing. She’s had to reschedule appointments because the bus schedules simply don’t align.

Even basic travel becomes complicated. One premium grocery store is technically within walking distance of Camp United, but there are no sidewalks, making the trip unsafe. Traveling to more affordable options requires multiple bus transfers. On weekends, there is no service at all. For Angelia, these gaps make employment feel out of reach. The hours required at many jobs don’t always align with limited bus schedules, and many camp residents find themselves stranded after evening shifts.

“I’m pretty much stuck here,” she says. She uses Facetime and phone calls to stay in touch with family and friends. “It’s just too hard to get there to see them in person”.

Infrequent service, and the lack of reliable first- and last-mile options are major gaps in a system that doesn’t meet her needs. Until those gaps are addressed, Angelia, and others like her, remain disconnected from work, healthcare, and community. ■



Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH J

For Elizabeth, transportation is the thread that connects every part of her life. Right now, that thread is wearing thin. A mother of four and a caregiver working in a nursing home, Elizabeth is trying to recover from serious health issues. She knows what she needs to do. She needs to attend physical therapy, follow through with medical treatment, and regain her strength so she can keep working. But without reliable transportation, those steps feel out of reach. As she puts it, “I want to get better. But how can I go to my appointments without a ride?”

After her family urged her to move from Seattle to a semi-rural part of Redmond for safety reasons, her transportation options became limited.

Accessing basic needs also became difficult. The only nearby grocery store is too expensive, but reaching more affordable options requires transportation she doesn’t have. Programs that could help often require more than one rider, leaving her without options when others around her already have cars.

“I want to get better. But how can I go to my appointments without a ride?”

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The barriers extend into her daily life. In rural areas, bus service often ends early, making it unsafe or impossible to get home from work after late evening shifts. One night, she tried walking home in the dark on a rural road without sidewalks or streetlights. “The further I got, the darker it got. I got really scared,” she says.

Elizabeth’s world has grown smaller. She no longer goes to community spaces or places that once helped her feel strong and connected. “Right now, I’m by myself. I feel really alone,” she says.

Elizabeth understands how everything is connected. If she could improve her health, she could return to work. If she could work, she could afford to move to a place where better transportation options exist. But without transportation, even the first step feels out of reach. ■



Morgan stands next to the Valley Shuttle (Snoqualmie Valley Transportation)

MORGAN

Living in the Snoqualmie Valley, Morgan sits in a gap between available transit options and actually being able to use them. While he values public transportation for its affordability and environmental benefits, access is limited by where he lives. Service is infrequent, especially in the evenings and on weekends, and simply reaching a bus stop can be a challenge in itself. Without a scheduled deviation, the nearest stop for Morgan is a 40-minute walk downhill. This can be manageable in one direction, but the return trip uphill can be physically impossible due to chronic pain that Morgan lives with. “I keep thinking about the time where I had no other choice than to do the entire walk

up the hill to get home, and how that exacerbated my health problems. It still affects me to this day. I’m always wondering if there’s a way to put more consideration into things like actual topography. A lot of people’s journeys do not end at their last bus stop!”

“A lot of people's journeys do not end at their last bus stop!”

And, from that stop, reaching Bellevue College meant multiple transfers, long waits, and a commute of more than two hours each way. If he missed one connection, the entire trip could unravel meaning he missed classes.

Snoqualmie Valley Transportation provides low-cost service within the Snoqualmie Valley, but reliability and frequency remain barriers. “If you miss a bus, there’s not another one until an hour later,”

Morgan explains. In rural areas like Duvall, and nearby communities like Carnation and Snoqualmie, these gaps leave riders stranded between limited options.

Morgan’s health issues, anxiety, and the cost of gas and parking make driving impractical. On days when driving isn’t possible, there often isn’t another option. That reality has led Morgan to miss community events, cancel plans, or avoid making them altogether.

For Morgan, the biggest barrier is the space between transit and destination: the first mile and last mile. In rural communities, that gap can be the difference between participation and isolation. ■



Alex stands at his local transit stop.

ALEX

A long-time King County resident now living in Redmond, Alex relies almost entirely on public transit due to a disability that limits walking and prevents biking. While trips on buses and trains are often planned alongside walking or biking, Alex says that assumption leaves people like him behind.

"There's an expectation that if you can't walk the last mile, you'll just drive," he explains. "But that's not an option for me." Even when transit exists, making it work requires constant trade-offs. Alex often chooses destinations farther away, like Seattle or Bellevue, because bus routes are more reliable and

better connected than those closer to home. In Redmond, gaps in service, long transfers, and limited last-mile options make nearby places harder to reach than ones miles away. Accessing healthcare presents similar challenges. In-person appointments can take hours to navigate by transit, forcing Alex to take significant time off work. As a result, he relies heavily on telemedicine, not out of preference, but necessity.

Transportation also shapes where he can live. Housing options are already limited on the Eastside, but even more so within reach of reliable transit. Social life is affected, too. Alex has skipped events in his own city because they were too difficult to reach while attending others farther away because the routes worked better. A lack of late-night service creates a kind of "curfew," making spontaneous outings rare.

Despite these barriers, Alex values public transit. On a good day, riding the bus or light rail offers a chance to relax and recharge.

What he wants is simple: a system that works consistently. One where routes connect, service is frequent, and people don't have to build their lives around the limits of transportation.

"Our communities should have a variety of options. Everyone should be able to easily navigate their community." ■

"Everyone should be able to easily navigate their community."



Jean.

JEAN

Jean has spent decades navigating King County, first as a driver and nurse, and now as a transit rider. At 79, she knows the region well, but getting around has become increasingly difficult. After giving up driving in 2006, Jean turned to buses, paratransit services, and taxis. Each option comes with trade-offs. For medical care at Harborview, she often uses a combination of services, relying on paratransit services to get there but choosing a taxi to get home. She explains that she

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“will not wait as an elderly person” after an appointment, especially when she sees others sitting for long periods, tired and unsure of when their ride will arrive.

“Paratransit services while helpful, can be unpredictable. Shared rides and long wait windows often turn a simple trip into a lengthy process.”

That choice comes at a cost. Taxis offer flexibility, but they are expensive, and Jean lives on a limited income. As a result, she must be selective about where she goes. She finds herself only doing what is necessary, such as medical appointments, because the cost of transportation makes everything else feel out of reach.

Paratransit services while helpful, can be unpredictable. Shared rides and long wait windows often turn a simple trip into a lengthy process. Weekends are especially challenging, with fewer drivers available. Jean has also tried non-emergency medical transportation through her insurance, but the process was so frustrating that she stopped using it all together and returned to paying for taxis.

Transportation has also affected her social life. After moving to Burien, where transit is less accessible than in Tukwila, she became more isolated. She used to walk to nearby services and take the bus to the senior center, but now those trips are harder to manage.

Jean believes a supportive system would provide timely rides and better service in neighborhoods, especially for older adults. Without that, she says, many people are left waiting, limited in where they can go, and forced to choose between cost and connection. ■



William stands in front of a Community Van.

WILLIAM

For William, transportation is one of the biggest barriers to stability, both for himself and for the community he helps support. William, 45, lives at Camp United We Stand (CUWS), a self-managed encampment that rotates between host sites in North King County. When he's not working seasonally in Alaska, he spends his time helping around camp and supporting other residents. But transportation often stands in the way of basic needs like employment, medical care, and groceries. At the camp's current location in Woodinville, simply getting to an appointment can take hours.

“You don't know what it's like to plan three hours of travel just to get somewhere,” he says.

Transit options are extremely limited. The main route serving the area—the 931—runs infrequently, and the stop sits at the top of a steep hill. In winter, walking there in the dark and rain can be dangerous. For many residents, especially older adults or those with health conditions, the trip is exhausting.

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Camp residents regularly travel long distances for doctor visits, tax appointments, or job opportunities. A simple grocery run can require multiple buses and long waits between transfers. Without a car, everyday errands become major logistical challenges. William knows firsthand how much difference reliable transportation can make. Since getting his own vehicle, many daily obstacles have eased but only a handful of people at camp have reliable cars.

“You don’t know what it’s like to plan three hours of travel just to get somewhere”

That’s why he’s interested in becoming a volunteer driver with Metro’s Community Van program. With access to a shared van, he could help transport residents to grocery stores, medical appointments, and other essential services. “It could help a lot of people,” he says.

For William, the solution is simple: transportation that actually reaches people where they live. “Not a stop a mile away,” he says. “Door to door, so people trying to work, get housing, or take care of their health can actually get there.” ■



A note from [Pride Across the Bridge](#): For this project, many of the stories being shared include names and photos, but that level of visibility isn’t accessible or safe for everyone. Within our local 2SLGBTQIA+ community, there are very real considerations around safety, privacy, and capacity that impact whether someone can, or is able to risk, publicly sharing their experience. Pride Across the Bridge is helping serve as a collaborator and amplifier for these voices, ensuring that community experiences, barriers, and patterns are still represented, even when individuals are not in a position to attach their name or image. We recognize that not everyone has the privilege of safety, time, childcare, or the emotional and physical capacity to take on the work of sharing their story publicly. The difficulty in reaching queer participants for this project is not a lack of need or experience, but a reflection of these realities. Participation in spaces like this often requires intentional outreach, deep trust, and relationships that are built over time. The stories we are able to share, and those we hold with care, both speak to the broader gaps our community continues to navigate.



PERSI

Persi lives in Issaquah and describes their experience with public transit as one defined by instability, shrinking access, and ongoing barriers to daily life. Living in what they call the “island of Issaquah,” Persi has watched routes change, reduce, or disappear altogether, often with little communication. What once included multiple connections between Seattle and Issaquah Highlands has been reduced to a single route, creating what they describe as a kind of whiplash, where services appear and then disappear, making it difficult to rely on transit for work, healthcare, or groceries.

Persi has also tried to engage in public input processes, but those efforts often lead to dead ends or unanswered messages, reinforcing the question “are community voices being heard?” They note that transit planning often feels disconnected from real life needs, supporting optional trips rather than the rigid schedules required for jobs, childcare, or medical care. Limited-service hours, especially buses ending around 10 pm, make it nearly impossible to attend evening events in Seattle and still get home.

“Without reliable transportation, employment options are limited, and opportunities for community participation, including volunteering, become inaccessible.”

Safety is another major concern. Bus stops are frequently located in isolated or poorly lit areas, sometimes near freeway on ramps, which can feel precarious, especially at night. Persi has experienced being stranded due to disruptions, adding to a broader sense of anxiety about missing connections or being unable to complete a trip. For someone who is non-binary, trans, and living with physical and mental disabilities, including dyslexia and being on the spectrum, these uncertainties can be overwhelming. Even small disruptions can derail an entire day.

These barriers ripple into every aspect of life. Without reliable transportation, employment options are limited, and opportunities for community participation, including volunteering, become inaccessible. Persi describes how, even when queer community spaces exist nearby, the effort and risk required to reach them can lead to a difficult choice, sometimes deciding it is easier to stay home than to navigate the system. ■



JL

JL is an Asian non-binary trans elder. Friends in their community consider JL to be an incredibly resilient person. One friend called JL 'an all-around Superstar'. Still, for JL, transportation presents real challenges. They do not use public transit after dark due to safety concerns shaped by both personal experience and what they have heard and witnessed in the community. JL has resided on the Eastside for decades. Over the years, they heard accounts from other LGBTQIA+ community members stuck at Eastside bus stops with hostile fellow riders. In recent years, they have observed hostility on

public transit, particularly directed at Asians in the aftermath of COVID. More generally, they have heard personal stories from other BIPOC, immigrant or non-male-presenting transit riders about being made to feel unwelcome or unsafe by other riders and at times even drivers. As a result of this collective community memory, they have been highly selective about where they go and when, often planning their entire day around being home safely before nightfall.

This level of planning takes effort and limits flexibility. For JL and other Asian individuals in the queer community, these experiences directly shape how they approach public transportation. JL recalls one incident where "an older white man went to the back of the bus and found the sole, unfortunate other white man there and started ranting about how much he wanted to hurt a South Asian rider and how much he hated Asians in general. The younger man looked very uncomfortable and scared, everyone else within hearing distance was BIPOC and was visibly uncomfortable."

These encounters create a constant sense of uncertainty. Even during routine trips, there is an underlying thought, "there's a chance this could happen today," which makes something as simple as getting to work feel risky and emotionally taxing. ■

"They do not use public transit after dark due to safety concerns shaped by both personal experience and what they have heard and witnessed in the community."



MILO

Milo lives near Redmond Technology Station and relies on public transit out of both necessity and survival. His experience has been shaped by a mix of dependence, barriers, and resilience. Early on, he used routes like the 271 from Issaquah to Bellevue College, a commute that took about an hour each way. On the way home, due to poor placement of the stop, the final stretch home was difficult, requiring him to walk along heavily trafficked roads before being picked up due to anxiety around fast-moving vehicles. This limited his independence and created a reliance on others.

Milo is a white, non-binary, trans individual with both mental and physical disabilities, and gaps in safe, accessible transit have had serious effects on his well-being. At times, the inability to reliably complete a trip home discouraged him from leaving the house, contributing to worsening depression and anxiety. In one case, access to transit influenced a major life decision, leading him to live with an abuser because it offered better mobility options.

“At times, the inability to reliably complete a trip home discouraged him from leaving the house, contributing to worsening depression and anxiety.”

Safety remains an ongoing concern. After attending an event in Seattle, Milo sought out a stranger to act as a transit companion rather than wait alone at night, sharing that it felt safer than being isolated and unsure if the bus would arrive. Reliability continues to be a major challenge, adding stress to every trip. Despite this, transit remains essential, enabling employment, connection, and access to community.

Milo described taking long, all-day bus trips to visit a friend in Anacortes. Milo was their only in-person trans connection at the time. These trips were more than visits; they were a form of mutual support and, at times, suicide prevention. For people outside of Seattle, transit can be the only way to access queer community and connection.

One experience stands out clearly. Milo was stranded in Seattle when a bus never arrived, waiting in the rain with no one nearby to help. He ultimately called an abusive ex for a ride, later reflecting that “things aren’t the best when you’re forced to call your ex to get home because they’re more reliable than public transit.” Moments like this have had lasting impacts, shaping how safe and dependable transit feels. ■



RAIN

Rain relies on public transit every weekday to get to work, and when the system works well, it provides essential access while reducing the stress of commuting. When it does not, the experience quickly becomes frustrating and unreliable. In search of consistency, she shifted from taking the bus to using the light rail, even though it added about 15 minutes to her commute, because the train is more predictable, more reliable, and not impacted by traffic. For Rain, it is a clear trade-off between time and dependability.

A major barrier she identifies is poor infrastructure planning around essential destinations, particularly grocery stores. Many are located several blocks from light rail stations, reinforcing a car-centric design. For example, accessing Safeway from the Overlake station requires navigating indirect routes, often without proper sidewalks or lighting, making what should be a simple trip unnecessarily complicated. Pedestrian safety is a concern, especially within a block or two of stations, where “it’s all crosswalks and it’s all people coming off or going on the freeway.” Incomplete sidewalks leave people exposed to fast-moving, multilane traffic without buffers, and while safer routes may exist, they often require backtracking, which can discourage trips altogether.

Rain also notes that bus stops can feel less safe than the buses themselves, as waiting environments often lack visibility, thoughtful design, and protection. ■

“Incomplete sidewalks leave people exposed to fast-moving, multilane traffic without buffers, and while safer routes may exist, they often require backtracking, which can discourage trips altogether.”