Transportation

Last updated: April 2014

Downtown Seattle is easy to get to and easy to get around via bus, walking, rail, bike and other modes of transportation. The Sounder commuter train from Everett or Tacoma? Light Rail from Tukwila? Express bus from Pierce or Snohomish County? A water taxi across Elliott Bay? By transit, car, bike or boat, Downtown residents, commuters and visitors have many transportation choices. This report details recent statistics from Downtown’s transportation service providers.

Total Downtown Ridership by Transportation Mode

Downtown Seattle bus and ferry ridership waned during the most recent recession. Since then, bus and ferry ridership increased to the same level experienced in 2008. Local rail ridership skyrocketed this past decade. Increasing every year, it is now eight times as high as 2004. Increased light rail ridership accounts for most of the increase in transit use. Light rail saw more than 12 times as many passengers in 2013 compared to the first full year of service in 2004. In the most recent five-year period, local rail ridership more than doubled. Bus and ferry ridership increased by three and two percent, respectively.

[Bar chart showing Downtown Transit Ridership by Mode]

Data in each category are the aggregate annual ridership from various transit agencies including King County Metro, Sound Transit, Community Transit and Washington State Ferries. Ferry numbers include both water taxi and ferries. Rail includes commuter rail and light rail. Long distance services such as Amtrak, Greyhound and Bolt bus are not included in this chart. Passengers who both boarded and alighted Downtown are not included in the bus totals.
How Downtown Employees and Residents Commute

Among Downtown employees, the largest share (43 percent) travel to work via transit. Just 34 percent of commuters drive alone to work:

**Downtown Employees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transit</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive Alone</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rideshare</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bike</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Downtown employee commute mode split figures are from the 2012 Commute Seattle Center City Mode Split Survey*

Most (60 percent) Downtown residents commute to work by either walking (34 percent) or transit (26 percent). Only 27 percent of Downtown residents drive alone to work:

**Downtown Residents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walk</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive Alone</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rideshare</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bike</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Downtown resident commute mode split figures are from Nielsen Demographics 2012 Estimates*
Bus

Several community bus services operate in Downtown, the hub of the region's mass transit system. In addition, Greyhound operates traditional long distance coaches as well as “Bolt” branded bus service from Seattle to Portland and Vancouver.

King County Metro

King County Metro provides both local and express bus service within King County. In 2013, King County Metro Transit weekday Downtown service averaged 166,500 rides each day. Weekend routes serving Downtown averaged 82,900 rides on Saturday and 58,600 on Sunday. As of fall 2013, Metro operated 122 routes Downtown on weekdays, 53 on Sundays and 48 on Saturdays. Downtown ridership in 2013 was 50 million (excluding passengers who both boarded and exited Downtown).

In September 2012, King County Metro rolled out RapidRide. RapidRide is a service characterized by frequent service. It includes new designs for buses, shelters and signs. The service features roadway improvements, traffic signal priority and an off-board payment system. These elements facilitate more frequent, efficient and faster bus service along these corridors.

In 2013, Metro saw continued ridership growth on RapidRide C and D lines, which connect Downtown Seattle with West Seattle, Uptown, and Ballard. Compared to pre-RapidRide service on these same corridors, the C line is ridership is up 53% and the D Line is up 20%. In 2014, Metro launched the RapidRide E line connecting Downtown Seattle with north Seattle and Shoreline. The E line will have more trips throughout the day and 25% more service than the route it replaces.

For more information visit www.metrokc.gov

Sound Transit’s ST Express Regional Bus

In 2013, Sound Transit express buses operated 13 routes Monday through Friday serving Downtown Seattle, averaging 3,995 bus trips each weekday. Eight routes operate on Saturday with 2,250 bus trips, and 8 routes with 1,524 bus trips on Sundays and holidays. For 2013, the average ridership on Sound Transit routes serving Downtown Seattle was 42,800 on weekdays. Weekend ridership was 18,600 on Saturdays and 8,800 on Sundays. Total Downtown Seattle ridership on Sound Transit operated buses was 12,650,000 in 2013.

For more information visit www.soundtransit.org

Community Transit

In 2013, Community Transit (Snohomish County) operated 13 routes into Downtown Seattle with annual ridership of 1.8 million, about the same level of ridership seen in 2012. For routes into Downtown Seattle, the average number of Community Transit riders per weekday was 7,217.

Community Transit rolled out the first two of 23 “Double Tall” double decker buses in March 2011. This addition to the fleet replaces older articulated buses and provides room for more passengers in less road space.

For more information visit www.commtrans.org
Rail

Downtown Seattle is served by Amtrak, the Seattle Monorail, the Seattle Streetcar, Sound Transit’s Link Light Rail and “Sounder” commuter trains.

The Seattle Monorail

The Seattle Monorail links Seattle Center and Uptown to Westlake Center in Downtown’s Retail Core. The Monorail was the nation’s first full-scale commercial monorail system and celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2012. The Monorail departs approximately every 10 minutes. In 2013, the Monorail carried 2.1 million riders.

For more information visit seattlemonorail.com

Amtrak

Amtrak operates one short distance train through Seattle, the Cascades, with two round trips between Eugene and Seattle, four between Portland and Seattle and two between Seattle and Vancouver BC. Amtrak also operates two long distance trains through Seattle daily: the Coast Starlight (Los Angeles – Seattle) and the Empire Builder (Chicago – Seattle). The Seattle station greeted 640,054 passengers in 2013. Total statewide ridership for all three routes (boarding or leaving within the state) was 1,281,739 passengers.

Along with local partners, Amtrak continues to invest in the Seattle Market. The SoDo neighborhood of Downtown Seattle is home to an Amtrak maintenance facility servicing both Amtrak and Sounder trains. The first two phases of construction of a modernized and expanded facility were completed late 2012. In addition, recent improvements to King Street Station included a $30.5 million interior and exterior restoration as well as $15 million in track improvements.

Source: Amtrak Fact Sheet, Fiscal Year 2013

Sound Transit’s Sounder Commuter Rail

Sound Transit operates two Sounder commuter rail lines. Sounder trains travel between Lakewood and Seattle (making stops in Tacoma, Puyallup, Sumner, Auburn, Kent and Tukwila) and between Everett and Seattle (making stops in Mukilteo and Edmonds). Sounder regularly runs weekday mornings and afternoons only. Sounder also serves select major weekend events such as Mariners and Seahawks games. Sounder makes 28 train trips (38,967 rail car trips) each weekday. There is also service to select events on weekends. For 2013, the average ridership on Sounder commuter rail was 10,600 on weekdays. Saturday event service was 1,500 and Sunday event service was 4,200. Total Sounder Commuter Rail ridership for 2013 was 3,035,000.

For more information visit www.soundtransit.org

Sound Transit’s Link Light Rail

Commuters can take Seattle’s quick and efficient light rail from Sea-Tac Airport to Downtown’s Retail Core at Westlake Station with 11 stops in between, including six stops Downtown.

In 2013, service between Downtown Seattle and Sea-Tac Airport Station averaged 258 trips each weekday, 230 trips on Saturday and 204 trips on Sundays and holidays. The average daily ridership on Central Link was 29,000 on weekdays, 24,000 on Saturdays and 18,000 Sundays and holidays. Total Link Light Rail ridership in 2013 was 9,680,000.
In 2009, construction began on two stations and tunnel tracks that will be a part of University Link, the next phase of the light rail system. This section of the light rail system will run through 3.15 mile bored tunnels connecting Downtown, Capitol Hill and the University of Washington. University Link will open for service in early 2016.

Future expansions will include construction of light rail to Northgate and beyond, as well as across Lake Washington to Bellevue and Overlake, and south from SeaTac to S. 200th Street to points further south.

For more information visit [www.soundtransit.org](http://www.soundtransit.org)

### Streetcar service

Completed in 2007, the South Lake Union Streetcar is a 1.3 mile line serving 11 stations in the South Lake Union and Denny Triangle neighborhoods. The line is owned by the City of Seattle and operated by King County Metro. In 2013, streetcar ridership was 755,340.

Construction started on the 2.5 mile First Hill Streetcar in 2012. The First Hill Streetcar will connect Capitol Hill, First Hill, Yesler Terrace, Central Area, Chinatown ID and Pioneer Square. This line will connect to First Hill’s medical centers, Seattle Central Community College, Seattle University and the stadiums. The First Hill Street Car is expected to begin operations in 2014.

For more information visit [www.seattlestreetcar.org](http://www.seattlestreetcar.org)

### Water

Many people get Downtown by boat via Elliott Bay from West Seattle, the Kitsap Peninsula, Bainbridge Island and Vashon Island, adding an element of charm and a great view of Seattle to the trip.

#### Washington State Ferries

The Washington State Ferry System is the largest ferry system in the United States. The system serves eight counties and the Province of British Columbia with 10 routes and 20 terminals and 28 vessels. Ferries are the primary mode of transportation from the Kitsap Peninsula and Bainbridge Island. For ferries serving Downtown, annual ridership in 2013 was 8.6 million riders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ferry Routes from Downtown</th>
<th>Vehicles</th>
<th>Vehicle Passengers</th>
<th>Foot only</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seattle-Bremerton</td>
<td>628,375</td>
<td>290,683</td>
<td>1,374,330</td>
<td>2,293,388</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seattle-Bainbridge</td>
<td>1,965,114</td>
<td>1,269,888</td>
<td>3,034,962</td>
<td>6,269,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,593,489</td>
<td>1,560,571</td>
<td>4,409,292</td>
<td>8,563,352</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Water Taxi

King County operates passenger-only ferries on weekdays for Vashon Island and West Seattle commuters.

- King County Ferry - West Seattle ridership (2013): 257,286
- King County Ferry - Vashon ridership (2013): 187,824

Sources: [Washington State Ferries Traffic Statistics](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov), [King County Metro](http://www.kingcounty.gov)

Unless noted, the research data presented in this document was generated by the Metropolitan Improvement District's Business Development & Market Research team, in cooperation with the Downtown Seattle Association. Please credit MID/DSA when using this data for external purposes. For more information, please email info@downtownseattle.org or call (206) 623-0340.
Car

Downtown is easy to get to and around by car, partially due to the many mass transit options, incentives for carpooling and investment in infrastructure.

Once Downtown, drivers have their choice of spaces, including approximately 78,000 spaces in Downtown Seattle garages and lots. For paid on-street parking, there are 5,000 spots in the traditional Downtown neighborhoods (west of Interstate 5 and south of Denny Way). For the broader Downtown (including South Lake Union, Capitol and First Hills and SoDo to S. Lander Street), there are more than 18,000 on-street spaces. For more information, visit www.downtownseattleparking.com.

Those who carpool can access exclusive freeway lanes and take advantage of carpool-only parking spaces. To find a rideshare option for yourself, visit www.rideshareonline.com.

Car-sharing services offer flexibility for those who choose not to drive their own vehicles Downtown. Zipcar maintains 185 vehicles Downtown (about 60 percent of the Seattle Zipcar fleet). The Car2Go Seattle fleet now numbers 500 vehicles up from 330 in 2012 and 43% larger than the next largest fleet in the nation). Car sharing is a popular and growing option for Downtown Seattle’s employees, residents and visitors.

Sources: City of Seattle Department of Finance and Administrative Services, Commute Seattle, Puget Sound Regional Council 2010 Parking Inventory, Seattle Department of Transportation

Alaskan Way Viaduct Replacement

The accumulative result of nearly a decade of advocacy at the local and state level was realized in 2009 with the decision by the state legislature to replace the Alaskan Way Viaduct. A deep-bore tunnel was selected as the preferred replacement option over other possible options including a new elevated structure and a surface street solution.

The Alaskan Way Viaduct replacement project includes a new waterfront park, improvements to surface streets along the waterfront and at the north and south tunnel entrances, and funding for increased transit service/bus lanes that will improve access to, and through, Downtown. The Alaskan Way Viaduct is officially slated for demolition upon completion of the bored-tunnel project.

For more information visit www.seattle.gov/transportation

Mercer Corridor Improvements

The City of Seattle has collaborated with King County and the State of Washington to improve mobility along the Mercer Corridor. With the first phase complete on the eastern portion of the project, SDOT expects to complete the final two phases in 2015. The design calls for realignment of the road to create a two-way thoroughfare in South Lake Union, multi-modal improvements and improved connections between neighborhoods east of Aurora Avenue and the Seattle Center.

For more information visit www.seattle.gov/transportation/mercercorridor.htm
Bike

Bicycling is a popular way to get to, and through, Downtown Seattle.

- In 2013, more than 100 new bicycle parking spaces were added Downtown, including a squid-shaped artistic bike rack that was moved to the central waterfront, where it has become an attraction for visitors of all ages.
- As the popularity of cycling grows so does the interest in separated bicycle facilities, such as cycle tracks. Planning is underway for a cycle track along Westlake Avenue to improve access to South Lake Union and Downtown from Fremont and points north, and along the Waterfront. Following the update of the Bicycle Master Plan, planning and design for additional cycle tracks in the Center City will begin.
- Downtown buildings offer parking capacity for 6,035 bicycles.
- The initial phase of the Puget Sound Bike Share network is expected to open in 2014 with 500 bicycles and dozens of stations in Downtown, South Lake Union, Eastlake, Capitol Hill, the University District and Sand Point.

Sources: Commute Seattle, Seattle Department of Transportation