

# ORCA Watch

## Public Transportation and YOUR PRIVACY



The privacy of transit riders should be maintained when public transportation payment systems incorporate technological advances. However, the implementation of the new ORCA system is raising questions about how our privacy rights will be protected.

Now is the time to address privacy concerns, when ORCA's technology, policies and procedures are still in development.

### ORCA – One Regional Card for All

Public transportation agencies in King, Pierce, Snohomish and Kitsap counties are developing a program that will replace all prepaid fare tickets and transfers with a radio frequency identification (RFID) smartcard. This new ORCA card is expected to replace passes received through schools and employers, or purchased through retail outlets.

### Details Collected about Transit Usage

Each time a rider uses an ORCA card, a computer will record the date and time of use, as well as the route and transit agency where the card was swiped. Participating transit agencies will have a history of each ORCA card's transactions, showing when you boarded specific buses, trains, ferries and vanpools.



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If employers and schools pay for a portion of your card, they also may have access to the card's transaction details. This includes the dates, times and routes taken by an individual cardholder – both when you are at work and school and when you are on your own time.

### Protect our Privacy When We Travel

Transit agencies involved in ORCA should address the following concerns to protect riders' privacy or security.

**CONCERN: Employers, schools and other organizations will have access to an individual's travel details.**

Transaction details about date, time and route number of public transit use can reveal information about your life, including religious and political activities. Having access to such information would enable others to monitor and track of your actions, without your consent. An employer should not be able to know where you catch the bus each Sunday morning. Schools should not know who took a bus after a nearby protest ended.

### SOLUTIONS:

- Create transit policy to protect the privacy of an individual's transaction history.
- Meet the reporting needs of organizations subsidizing or providing fare passes by providing aggregate or less detailed information.

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**CONCERN:** Information about an individual's transportation usage will accumulate over time and could be reused for unintended purposes.

Other organizations and individuals may seek to obtain database information about how and when individuals use public transit. In other states, third parties already are obtaining details of individuals' travel histories for use in divorce and custody cases – all they need is the card number associated with the fare pass and transaction history.

**SOLUTIONS:**

- Create transit policy to retain an individual's transaction data only for the shortest time required by law.
- Maintain only aggregate transaction information for transit analysis and planning purposes.

**CONCERN:** Unauthorized reading or "skimming" of information on the ORCA card's RFID chip will put people's privacy at risk without their knowledge.

To enable fare payments, ORCA cards will store and transmit information about recent rides, along with a unique card identification number. An unchanging unique identification number – when attached to a person or that person's card – can become a means for others to monitor the person's movements. ORCA cards should not transmit information to potential stalkers or anyone else looking to collect information about your travels.

**SOLUTIONS:**

- Ensure that only legitimate transit agency readers can access unique identification numbers or other information stored on ORCA cards.
- Ensure that unauthorized parties cannot track a card through the RFID tag's unique identification number.

### **It's Not Too Late to Make Changes**

Policies and procedures for the retention, sharing and use of information collected by ORCA are still in development. Privacy concerns should be addressed now, before the ORCA system is implemented.