

Communication and Social Action: Policy Stories in the 2011 King County Metro Funding Debate

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Abstract

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Urban planners and public policy analysts are surrounded by heated policy debates. Knowing how to recognize and decipher the structures and techniques of persuasive communication will enable planners to construct their communications more carefully, develop effective persuasive messages, and identify common ground in policy debates. To this end, I used theories from communications, sociology, and other fields to construct a model of a Public Policy Story, a strategic narrative designed to persuade an audience to support a policy action. The story is composed of three plot elements – problem, cause, and solution – and three character groups – victim, villain, and hero. Other communication devices such as appeals to audience values are woven throughout the policy story, and stories of personal experience are often included to heighten the salience of the victim and hero characters. I applied this model to a debate over a funding proposal for King County Metro Transit in 2011, examining the editorials, Op-Eds, and letters to the editor from the Seattle Times.

I found two primary policy stories in this debate: the “Bus Cuts” story and the “Inefficient Government” story. Both followed the general outline of the Public Policy Story but each was weak in some areas. Transit supporters focused on the problem and victim part of the story, but did not have a strong cause or villain. Fee opponents did not describe the problem or victim at length, but focused on a strong cause (Metro inefficiency) and villain (public officials). Both sides appealed to common societal values, including efficiency, the economy, and reducing traffic congestion. Fee opponents framed the

issue as inefficient and untrustworthy government, while supporters focused on the how public transit helps car drivers and bus riders. In letters to the editor, stories of personal experience used by people on all sides of the debate to amplify a character, usually the victim, including bus riders hurt by the cuts and car owners objecting to the fee.

The Public Policy Story framework can be applied to any public policy debate by examining the structure of each argument for these plot and character components. Depending on one's purpose, this can be used to strengthen a policy story, attack another's policy story, or find common ground. The framework can also be used to examine which players are missing in a policy debate and how different characters are constructed.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	4
2.1 Introduction	4
2.2 Discourse Analysis	4
2.3 Communication in Public Policy	5
2.4 Framing	6
2.5 Narrative Theory	11
2.6 Policy Debates	12
2.6.1 Problems and the People Impacted	12
2.6.2 Causes and the People Responsible	15
2.6.3 Solutions	17
2.6.4 Values	18
2.6.5 Personal Experience Stories	22
2.7 Public Policy Stories	23
Chapter 3: Methodology	25
3.1 Research Question	26
3.2 The Media as a Site for Social Action	26
3.3 Locating Texts	30
3.4 General Coding	31
3.5 Values	32
3.6 Policy Stories	32
3.7 Personal Experience Stories	33
3.8 Analysis Outline	34
Chapter 4: Values Analysis	34
4.1 Introduction	34
4.2 Efficiency	39
4.3 The Economy	41
4.4 Reduce Traffic Congestion	42
4.5 Equity and Fairness	43
4.6 Political Representation	45
4.7 Civic Virtue	47
4.8 Environment	49

4.9 Values Conclusion	50
Chapter 5: Policy Story Analysis	53
5.1 Editorial 6/30/11	55
5.2 Op-Ed 7/18/11	61
5.3 Op-Ed, 7/22/11	68
5.4 Op-Ed 7/23/11	71
5.5 Editorial 7/24/11	75
5.6 Editorial 7/27/11	77
5.7 Comparison of Policy Stories	79
Chapter 6: Personal Experience Stories Analysis	82
Chapter 7: Discussion	85
7.1 Public Policy Story	85
7.2 Values	85
7.3 Character Portrayal and Personal Stories	86
7.4 Finding Common Ground	87
Chapter 8: Conclusion	87
Chapter 9: Bibliography	88

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

King County Metro Transit (Metro) is the primary public transit provider in King County, Washington, a jurisdiction of about two million people which includes the city of Seattle. In 2011, after several years of declining sales tax revenue and cost-cutting measures, Metro had an annual budget deficit of \$60 million and announced it would have to reduce bus service by 17% unless new funding was found, causing considerable anxiety among bus riders and some public officials. In the spring of 2011, legislation narrowly passed the Washington legislature to allow King County to levy a temporary vehicle license fee, called the “Congestion Reduction Charge” (CRC), to fund Metro. As stipulated in the legislation, the fee of \$20 per year on each vehicle licensed in the county would last two years and could only be enacted by a super-majority of the County Council or a majority of King County voters.

King County Executive Dow Constantine proposed the Congestion Reduction Charge to the County Council on June 20, 2011 and called for a super-majority vote (six of nine Councilmembers) to enact it, rather than a vote to send the measure to voters on the November ballot. At the time of his proposal, only four of the nine Councilmembers supported a “Councilmanic” vote to enact the fee, well short of the six needed, whereas a vote to send the measure to voters was seen as likely to pass the Council. However, the Council vote, originally scheduled for July 25th, was postponed at the last minute as several Councilmembers negotiated small changes to the proposal and appeared likely to switch their votes to support a Councilmanic enactment of the fee. Finally on August 15th, exactly eight weeks after the measure was proposed, the Council voted 7-2 to enact the fee.

During this eight-week period, there was considerable public discussion over the issue, including public hearings, media attention, and a lively debate in the Seattle Times, the leading newspaper in King County. While we can’t prove that the character of the public debate caused the outcome of the vote, the way this debate was framed in the public realm most certainly influenced the way the public

understood the policy issue. To understand how this process worked, I will be considering one piece of the public debate, texts from the Seattle Times, to analyze how people tried to convince others to support or oppose the fee.

Analyzing the language of public policy debates is important because words have power. The language used to describe a public policy or planning issue can often influence the outcome. Language can influence why some situations come to be considered problems requiring action while others are simply ignored. Language can mobilize people to get involved in a cause, can harden policy stalemates, or can bring people together under a common vision. Understanding how words influence opinions and policies is important for planners, public officials, advocates and voters. Yet the publics who are affected by planning and public policies are often unaware of how messages are influencing debates and their own opinions. A better understanding will help us all be more effective participants in public policy and planning decisions.

To this end, I am interested in how select participants in the 2011 King County Metro funding debate used communication techniques in attempts to persuade their public audiences. Specifically, I am interested in the following questions:

- How were persuasive messages structured? Did they follow a framework? Did they contain common communication techniques and plot components found in other forms of public policy debate?
- How did participants appeal to social values?
- How were stories of personal experience used in the debate?
- How were people and groups portrayed?

To answer these questions I focus on a specific site of public debate, namely the news articles, letters to the editor, Op-Eds, and editorials published online and in print in the Seattle Times, the

dominant newspaper in the region. Of course, this is not an exhaustive study of policy debates in the public realm, or even of how this particular issue was debated within the public sphere. Other communications could be analyzed to broaden our understanding of messaging techniques, such as speeches by public officials, legislative text, and coverage in other media outlets. However, I chose to examine the Seattle Times site because it is read by a relatively wide audience (as compared to speeches or legislation) but also of a size and format manageable for my analysis (as compared to, say, TV coverage of the issue).

My hope is that by looking carefully at how language and narrative are used in this public policy debate, planners, public administrators, advocates, and the public at large will better understand how messages are used in public policy debates, so they can recognize common argument structures and techniques, carefully evaluate messages, and thoughtfully construct their own communication. Planners and public administrators are constantly communicating with many types of audiences about policy issues, many of which are controversial, and are surrounded by people and organizations with differing and often passionate opinions. Professionals in this field should be aware of the language they use, which may inadvertently portray situations, issues, people, or events in ways that influence a debate. Becoming familiar with common communication techniques and argument structures can also provide insight into exactly where different parties agree and disagree, which may help in attempts to find common ground. In addition, everyone needs the skills to speak persuasively on a public policy issue, even policy and planning professionals who might not typically think of themselves as taking sides. For example, policy analysts may be better able to explain the rationale for plans to agencies or elected leaders if they understand how persuasive communication techniques and structures work.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

I have reviewed literature relating to persuasive communication in public policy from a variety of fields, including sociology, communications, and political science. I start my review with an overview of “discourse analysis” – why and how to analyze communication – this includes basic ideas that underlie the rest of my work. I then review how the public policy field has viewed the role of discourse in policymaking. Two primary techniques of structuring communications are framing and narratives, and I review the literature on those topics. I then turn to how framing and narratives have been used in public policy debates, including the structures of a “public policy story” and the use of values, interests, and personal stories.

2.2 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a field that encompasses theory and method to explore how language creates meaning. The field is “social constructionist,” reflecting the view that ways of talking or writing do not neutrally reflect the world but play an active role in creating and changing it (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002; Hastings 1998). Grammar, vocabulary, and metaphor are considered ideologically significant, influencing how the reader or listener understands what is being said in a particular way (Hastings 1998). This idea that meaning is socially constructed through communication is the broad underpinning of my work.

One role of discourse analysis is to examine how social actors are represented in a text: for example, is a particular group portrayed as active or passive (van Leeuwen 1996, 51, as cited in Pickert 2009). A person or group can also be omitted entirely from a scene through “nominalization” - turning a process or action into a noun and thereby leaving out agency –who did what (Hastings 1998; Fairclough

1992). These representations can impact how people see these groups and themselves, for example by encouraging or limiting belief in one's ability to create change (Hastings 1998).

2.3 Communication in Public Policy

The field of public policy was traditionally dominated by a "positivist" approach to knowledge and "rational" approach to policy making (Stone 2002; Hastings 1998). In the positivist view of knowledge, there is an objective reality "out there" waiting to be discovered and described. As Hastings (1998, 193) writes, "The positivist theory of knowledge assumes there is a simple relationship between 'knowledge' and 'reality' and that objective, unbiased understanding is possible." From the positivist epistemology comes the rational model of policy making, in which elected leaders define goals, neutral analysts gather objective and measurable data, analyze it logically, compare alternatives, and recommend which will best meet a clearly defined policy goal.

"Post-positivists" and "social constructionists", on the other hand, view knowledge differently. Rather than one reality that exists and can be described, there are multiple perspectives, versions, and portrayals of reality (Stone 2002; Hastings 1998). In the act of describing what is seen, humans unconsciously use their own experience to select what is most meaningful and use language to construct a perception of reality (Hastings 1998, 194-195). Post-positivists and social constructionists see policy-making as a process of argumentation, with social actors portraying an issue or event in a particular way to gain adherents to their side (Hastings 1998; Stone 2002; Fischer and Forester 1993). One of the leaders in the post-positivist approach to social policy is political scientist Deborah Stone. Stone devised a "rhetoric of policy argument," to analyze how goals, problems, causes, and solutions are commonly conceived, described, and debated (Stone 2002). Stone considers no part of the policy process to be value-neutral; everything is contested, including how a problem is defined, how a cause is

determined, and how alternatives are created. Furthermore, Stone views political argumentation as a useful way for people with different viewpoints to interact, rather than a nuisance to be avoided.

2.4 Framing

Framing is a key technique used in public policy debates. First I will explore the general meaning of framing and then investigate its use in public policy debates, social movements, and the media. One of the early framing theorists was sociologist Erving Goffman, who investigated how people perceive and interpret social interactions and events. As he wrote, “When people attend to any current situation, they face the question, ‘What is it that’s going on here?’” (Goffman 1974, 8). In a single event, many different things happen at the same time, and the event can be perceived and described in different ways by different participants. Goffman argued that individuals unconsciously use an internal framework or perspective when perceiving and interpreting the event, which makes some aspects of the scene more meaningful than others. The question “What is it that’s going on here?” can be quickly answered with a category from the framework, based on past experience.

Goffman’s insights are focused on how individuals *internally* make sense of experiences or situations, rather than how they communicate a situation to others. However, several authors have defined framing as having two distinct parts: frames in communication and frames in thought (Kinder and Nelson 2005; Chong and Druckman 2007). Frames in communication include the text, words, images, or information put out by the communicator. Frames in thought are the message-recipient’s internal perspectives and beliefs, which translate incoming information to fit in with “the pictures in our heads” (Gilliam 2003, as quoted in Dorfman 2005, 324). The trick for a successful communicator is to fit the frames in communication with the audience’s frames in thought in a way that wins the audience to their side.

Entman (1993) describes framing as being about selection and salience. Selection is the role of the communicator, choosing some aspects of a situation to highlight in a message; salience is what the audience finds most noticeable and meaningful in the incoming message. The purpose of selection by the communicator is to highlight what is most salient for the audience in a way that furthers their goals. Of course, this requires knowing or making assumptions about what the audience cares about. “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman 1993, 52).

Frames in thought, based on prior experiences, help people make judgments. Rather than re-discover the world every day, people unconsciously make sense of it quickly by putting experiences into categories based on experience. “Individuals bring their own life histories, social interactions, and psychological predispositions to the process of constructing meaning” (Gamson and Modigliani 1989, 2).

While framing can apply to anything –an event, an argument, a person or group, we will focus here on framing in public policy debates. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) define a frame as a “central organizing idea” in an interpretive package about a policy issue, used to make sense of events and suggest what is important. There can be disagreements within a frame, but the frame limits what considerations and ideas are included. The interpretive package is a product of cultural resonance, the media, and activities of “sponsors.” Packages that resonate with larger cultural themes are generally more successful. “Sponsors” such as public officials and advocates attempt to promote an interpretive package through speeches, advertising, pamphlets, and other activities. Journalists include and repeat some packages while excluding or questioning others.

Some political scientists have considered how framing may impact the importance a person gives to the different dimensions of an issue, and thus their position on that issue (Chong and Druckman 2007; Nelson et al 1997). For example, economic growth and public safety are broad goals that could be

considered dimensions of the issue of nuclear power. The typical argument might be that nuclear power helps economic growth but hurts public safety. Two individuals with the same information might place different importance on those two dimensions and then reach different conclusions about the desirability of nuclear power (Nelson et al 1997). In this case, the “frame in thought” is either the importance of the value of economic growth or the importance of public safety. A communicator might make an assumption that a particular audience places a higher value on economic growth, and thus emphasizes that dimension of the nuclear power issue when communicating to them.

Nelson et al (1997) differentiate framing from the theory of “belief change,” whereby individuals change their opinion after receiving new information. Instead of providing new information, framing activates information, beliefs, or values that audience members already possess. People feel differently about an issue after it is framed, not because of a change in beliefs, but because they now place more (or less) importance on some aspects of the issue. There are therefore two ways to change an individual’s attitude toward an issue: change the person’s beliefs about a consideration, or change the weight given to that consideration (Nelson et al 1997, 226).

Public opinion surveys have shown that framing can influence how people feel about public policy issues. Several researchers have found that when a public policy issue is presented with one frame (typically relating to a goal or value), the frame influences respondents’ stated position on the issue. For example, Sniderman and Theriault (2004) asked people if they would support or oppose allowing a political rally for a hate group. When the question was prefaced with the statement, “Given the importance of free speech,” 85% of respondents said yes. When the question was prefaced with “Given the risk of violence,” 45% said yes. Each question emphasized a different value or goal that could be connected to the rally – the value of free speech and the goal of reducing violence. The authors point out that these surveys gave each respondent only one side of an issue, which does not replicate many policy debates with competing frames or value appeals. They conducted additional surveys that

contained two competing frames for each respondent and found that people generally applied their pre-existing values to the issue at hand. They also found that people with a higher level of political information more strongly adhered to their prior view when presented with competing frames (Sniderman and Theriault 2004, 154). Kinder and Nelson (2005) compared survey results when people were asked questions with two competing frames versus questions that were “un-framed.” When the question was asked without framing, more people said they had no opinion. The authors conclude that frames help citizens understand policy issues, by providing considerations for forming opinions (Kinder and Nelson 2005, 110).

Scholars of social movements have examined how movement participants use framing and the construction of communication messages to build their movements. They refer to the communication as “collective action framing” or “injustice framing.” Benford and Snow (2000) list three components of collective action framing: diagnostic framing (what the problem is and who caused it), prognostic framing (the solution), and a call to action. Gamson (1995) describes an “injustice frame” as including a problem, a villain, a proposed solution, and a hero – the common person who gets involved. The key elements are making the problem dramatic and relevant to the audience member, showing that it was caused by a person (the villain), that something can be done about it (solution) and that collective action can make a difference.

Cress and Snow (2000) found that “coherent and articulate” diagnostic and prognostic framing is one reason some social movements are successful in meeting their goals. Their examination of fifteen homeless advocacy organizations across the country in the 1980s found that, among other factors, a clear description of the problem, cause, and solution helped the organization be successful. The most viable organizations were more adaptive in their framing, and could develop or modify their description of problem, cause, and solution in a way to help achieve their goals. As Cress and Snow (2000, 1100) write: “...both diagnostic and prognostic framing not only help define and bring into sharp focus

grievances, targets of blame, targets of action, and lines of action, but, in doing so, may also help SMOs [Social Movement Organizations] secure or enhance organizational legitimacy.”

The mass media is a key location where policy actors compete to define or frame an issue and win the public to their side. Entman (1993) describes framing in news coverage as “imprint of power,” demonstrating the influence of the actor who promoted that frame. Graber (2002, 173) defines a media frame as “reporting the news from a particular perspective so that some aspects of the situation come into close focus and others fade into the background.” Gamson and Modigliani (1989) argue that some issues are portrayed with a “dominant frame” in the media for a period of time, packaged the same way by the news media, public officials, and advocates, whereas other issues may have more than one “competing interpretive package.” Entman (1993) suggests that one level of analysis of an issue may be framed homogeneously (such as the problem description), while other levels (such as the solution) have competing frames. For example, in the run-up to the first Gulf War in 1990, there was a debate about whether the U.S. should enact sanctions or go to war, but the problem and cause were consistently framed in the same way, only the proper solution was debated (Entman 1993). If one frame has been dominant in public discourse and the media, policy actors may attempt to “reframe” the debate. The FrameWorks Institute advises advocacy organizations to use “rival frames” to encourage the public to think differently about an issue (FrameWorks Institute 2002).

Several studies have examined whether the tone of news coverage affects readers. Druckman and Parkin (2005), in a study of two newspapers’ coverage of a Senate campaign, found that “bias” in news coverage influenced voters’ decisions. Kim, Scheufele, and Shanahan (2002) found that the attributes of an issue focused on by news coverage increased the importance of those issue attributes to audiences. Iyengar (1991) found that “episodic” media frames, which focus on individuals, encourage the public to attribute social problems to the individual, whereas “thematic” frames, which focus on broader forces, encourage people to attribute problems to external forces.

Framing gained attention in political circles in the late 1990s and early 2000s, first with Republican pollster Frank Luntz, who used focus groups to determine which terms and phrases resonated with an audience's pre-existing ideas (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007). Audience knowledge refers to the "frames in thought" concept and allows policy actors to make their "frames in communication" as salient and effective as possible to a particular audience. The publication of "Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate" by socio-linguist and liberal activist George Lakoff in 2004 further heightened the attention on framing. Gabrielson (2005) argues that not all issues are equally available for successful framing by elected officials; new issues are more open to framing than those with a high degree of historical conflict (like abortion), because the audience does not have hardened internal beliefs. However, she cautions that all issues have history and context: "...even new issues are linked to similar issues of the past in order to gain some purchase on how they might best be handled and understood" (Gabrielson 2005, 88). An audience's prior beliefs are always important in persuasion.

2.5 Narrative Theory

Another way of studying social texts is through narrative analysis. Jones and McBeth (2010) define narrative as a chronological sequence of events in a plot that includes dramatic moments, symbols, and archetypal characters and culminates in a moral to the story. Boswell (2013, 622) defines narrative in the public policy realm as "a chronological account that helps actors make sense of and argue about a political issue." Narrative has gotten increasing attention in many fields over the past several years as a universal mode of communication and a primary way humans "organize, process, and convey information" (Jones and McBeth 2010, 330). Fisher (1987) argues that humans understand their own lives in terms of narratives and therefore narratives can help us understand the actions of others.

Narrative theory is “social constructionist”: rather than representing a world that already exists, narratives help create social reality by influencing how people see things. Somers (1994) argues that this includes the construction of identities, as people locate themselves in stories. As she writes, “...people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives” (Somers 1994, 614). For example, narratives include characters with varying degrees of agency – some make important decisions while others are powerless; many are typecast as victims, villains, and heroes (Boswell 2013). Another function of narratives is to make independent events significant by relating them to other events; this is referred to as “emplotment” (Somers 1994). In a public policy debate, events can be linked through a causal chain, with a beginning telling how the problem started and where it came from and an end explaining how to solve the problem (Boswell 2013; Kaplan 1993).

2.6 Policy Debates

Now that we’ve examined the concepts of framing and narrative, we can review literature that applies framing and narrative to common elements of a public policy debate. I will start with how the problem, cause, and solution in a debate are framed or narratively constructed, then consider how values, interests, characters, and personal stories are interwoven in to these frames and story elements.

2.6.1 Problems and the People Impacted

“There is no such thing as an apolitical problem definition. In confronting any definition of a policy problem, the astute analyst needs to ask how that definition also defines interested parties and stakes, how it allocates the roles of bully and underdog, and how a different definition would change power relations.” (Stone 2002, 231)

Many years ago, sociologists Specter and Kitsuse (1977) challenged the tradition of assuming certain social conditions are automatically social problems (such as crime, prostitution, or poverty). Instead, they assert that a condition becomes a problem when people think it's a problem, and that individuals or groups use a process of “claims making” to convince others that a condition is a problem. For example, one individual may define a particular criminal act as a key problem, while another sees that act as a minor issue but sees police conduct as the major problem to be addressed (Cohen and Short 1971, as quoted in Specter and Kitsuse 1977, 5). Both individuals frame the situation to highlight what they find most meaningful or problematic.

Traditional political science theory assumes that once a social problem is agreed upon, analysis and evidence is *then* used to generate solutions (Stone 2002). However, many have challenged this view of the process. Kingdon wrote that solutions and problems are generated in separate “streams” and that “policy entrepreneurs” often start with their pet solutions and then look for a recognized problem to attach to it (Kingdon 1984). For example, transit proponents attached their solution (transit) to problems like air pollution, the oil embargo, and obesity at different times when those problems were on the public agenda.

Specter and Kitsuse (1977) and Stone (2002) argue that successfully convincing others that a condition is a problem depends on creating the perception that it can be changed by humans, which often requires having a solution in mind. “People do not define as problems those conditions they feel are immutable, inherent in human nature, or the will of God” but instead become dissatisfied only when they believe there is a solution for the trouble (Specter and Kitsuse 1977, 84).

Stone describes problem definition as “the strategic representation of situations” in a way that promotes a preferred course of action, geared to win the most people to one’s side (Stone 2002, 133). This is done by “framing” the problem – focusing on some aspects of a situation rather than others - to appeal to a particular audience. A key part of the problem definition is the name. “The name assigned

to a problematic terrain focuses attention on certain elements and leads to neglect of others,” (Rein and Schon 1993, 153).

In defining a problem, a social actor attempts to get a group of people involved in the issue on a particular side; this includes both defining the people impacted by the problem (the “victims” or “interest group”) and appealing to a wider audience (Stone 2002; Gamson 1995; Rochefort and Cobb 1993). First, the problem definition must state who is affected by the problem (the “victim”). As Stone points out, this is not a neutral, rational, observational statement of who is impacted negatively, but is a strategic portrayal, designed to convince a group of people they are hurt by the problem. Stone argues that people do not have objective “interests,” instead they decide when an issue affects them or others; when, how, and why they make that determination is key and is often generated through policy debates. Convincing a group that they are impacted by a problem creates an “interest group” and the potential for political alliances (Stone 2002, 231).

The way the “victims” of a problem are portrayed to a wider audience can be important for the success or failure of the desired policy solution. Some scholars have found that people judge a public policy in part based on how they judge the social group that is perceived to benefit from that policy. For example, a person who views low-income individuals benefiting from anti-poverty programs as lazy is more likely to oppose those programs (Nelson and Kinder 1996). “Americans reach political decisions on matters of policy as if they had first determined the moral qualifications of the intended beneficiaries” (Nelson and Kinder 1996, 1071). Nelson and Kinder show that judging a policy based on perception of the beneficiaries happens much more frequently when the group’s “moral qualifications” are highlighted in media framing.

The way a problem is defined can also serve to strategically attract or discourage participation in the debate from the general public (Rochefort and Cobb 1994, 5). A narrow and technical problem description may be designed to limit participation to the “experts,” while a definition that appeals to

broad societal values may be designed to encourage widespread participation (Rochefort and Cobb 1993). The weaker side in the conflict will often want to expand involvement by getting more people to support its side.

Narratives can also be used to “frame” a policy debate by “telling the story” of a particular problem through a particular narrative genre. For example, Stone (2002) argues there are two primary types of problem definition stories: stories of decline and stories of control. In stories of decline, conditions were good in the past, now they are bad, and there will be a crisis if action isn’t taken. Facts and figures are often included to show that things have gotten worse. In stories of control, people always thought nothing could be done about a bad situation, but now know that there is a choice. The choice may belong to society, elites, or to the victims, but in all cases the situation has moved from a fact of nature to a deliberate human action. While stories of decline create anxiety, stories of control offer hope. Often the two stories are woven together (Stone 2002, 143-144)

2.6.2 Causes and the People Responsible

Problem narratives, whether of decline or control, help identify the primary “actors” responsible for them and the cause. In a public policy debate, asserting what and who caused the problem is essential for defining the solution, and therefore is often fiercely debated (Rein and Schon 1977; Stone 1989). Social movement theorists make a similar claim, asserting that defining a “who” behind the cause of a social problem is necessary for motivating anger and broader involvement in the issue (Gamson 1995). An adversarial component, including a concrete target who caused the problem and an “us versus them” frame, motivates people to get involved (Gamson 1995). Consequently, the causal story is used to cast blame on an individual or group. This in turn motivates anger and participation by the public and victims.

For some issues, there is a debate over whether the problem is caused by deliberate human action or is instead an accident or unintended consequence (Stone 1989). For example, was a nuclear leak caused by insufficient enforcement of safety rules or was it caused by unavoidable human error? This has consequences for defining the solution: if the cause of a bad situation is accidental or a force of nature, there may be nothing to be done (Stone 1989). Stone created a typology of causal stories ranging from accident to intentional (Stone 1989). In an accident story, the cause is beyond human control; public action cannot prevent the problem, although it may mitigate the impact (for example, famine or flood relief). In an intentional story, human beings purposefully took action and got the desired result; when the consequences are good, it's a success; when they are bad, it's oppression. In an inadvertent story, willful human action produced unintended consequences. Stone finds that more complex causal explanations are not very useful in politics because there is not a single actor to take responsibility or a single way to fix the problem (Stone 1989, 289). The most effective way to get people on your side is to convince them that a person intentionally caused you harm.

As an example of how determinations of cause are linked to solutions, Rochefort and Cobb (1994) consider Los Angeles in the wake of the Rodney King verdict. If racial and economic inequality is a cause of the unrest (termed "riots" in some quarters and "uprisings" in others), social justice measures and economic opportunities are the solution. If the weak police response is the cause, better police management is the solution. The "riots" were a dramatic event that sparked prolonged attention and debate over who or what was responsible, and determining the cause would determine what solution should be attempted.

Stone believes there are always choices about which causal factors to address; the choice of cause to focus on determines which actor holds responsibility and which group or institution has to change or pay a price to right the situation (Stone 1989, 296). For example, on the issue of drunk driving, responsibility could be focused on the driver, the bar/restaurant/store where the alcohol was

purchased, the transportation system, the vehicle design, and more. Determining which cause is most important and who is responsible/at fault is a fight over moral responsibility and economic cost on the person responsible. The political strength of the different actors help determine which group gets held responsible. (Stone 1989, 297). The causal story is most likely to be successful if it fits in with cultural values, the “national mood,” and if the proponents have prominent positions, visibility, and access to media (Stone 1989). Benford and Snow (2000) contend that there is often disagreement within social movements about the source of the problem and who to blame.

For Specter and Kitsuse (1977), a claim that a social condition is a problem is also a “demand that one party makes upon another” by calling on the alleged responsible party to take action (1977, 83). When claimants look for a responsible party, they first construct a cause of the problematic condition, assign blame, and find officials who are responsible for fixing the condition. If they find that no one is in charge of fixing the situation, they seek people who can assign responsibility. Or, claimants may investigate who benefits or profits from the problematic condition and determine they have responsibility for fixing it (Specter and Kitsuse 1977, 83)

2.6.3 Solutions

When social actors advocate for a public policy through construction of a problem and cause, the solution must then follow in their narrative – it is “what is to be done” to address the problematic situation. Without a solution, there is no public policy debate. For social movement theorists, the solution is known as a “prognostic frame,” and is needed to generate participation in a movement (Benford and Snow 2000, 616).

The solution usually is narrated as if it flows directly from the identified cause of the problem. We don’t know how to solve the problem unless we know what caused it. Of course, as we’ve seen, there are often multiple causal factors identified for a given problem, each with its own solution. Benford and Snow (2000) find that the diagnostic frame about the nature of a problem and its cause and

the prognostic frame tend to coincide; the identification of the problem and what caused it constrains the range of solutions. When social movements advocate for a particular solution, it's within the context of other organizations, opponents, targets, the media, and the public, many of which may frame reality differently. Thus, social movements often must include "counterframing" in their solution – framing that refutes others' solutions. Furthermore, many activists in the same movement may agree on the definition of a problem but differ on the solution; for example, some opponents of the death penalty advocate abolishing the death penalty while others defend clients individually (Benford and Snow 2000).

As stated earlier, some theorists believe social actors come to a public policy debate with a preferred solution in mind and then attach it to the popular problem of the day through a causal story (Kingdon, 1984; Stone 2002, 207). As Specter and Kitsuse write (1977, 84) "...solutions produce problems by providing the framework within which those problems can be stated."

Most policy debates include problem definitions, causes, solutions, and key actors, which are defined through frames and narratives. Beneath these elements are dimensions of policy stories that are important to shaping the public's response, including constructing and appealing to the values of the audience.

2.6.4 Values

Social scientists have been defining the term "values" for decades. Kluckhohn (1951, 395) defined a value as: "a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable, which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action" (as quoted in Hitlin 2004). Rokeach (1973, 5) defined values as "enduring beliefs that a specific mode of conduct is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (as quoted in Hitlin 2004). The first definition is more about something a person or group wants and takes action to get, whereas the second focuses on conduct. Schwartz & Bilsky (1987, 551)

found five features of how values have commonly been defined in the literature: "(a) concepts or beliefs, (b) about desirable end states or behaviors, (c) that transcend specific situations, (d) guide selection or evaluation of behavior and events, and (e) are ordered by relative importance" (as quoted in Hitlin 2004, 362).

Specter and Kitsuse (1977) take a different perspective on values, focusing on how people use values to press a claim. They define values as "explanations people give in support of their claims, complaints, or demands" (1977, 92). An individual or group, called a "claims maker" by Specter and Kitsuse, may want an action because it's in their self-interest, but that may not convince others to support the action. Therefore they appeal to the values they believe their target ascribes to. Specter and Kitsuse write: "Claims-makers do not simply say 'We want you to change this.' They say, 'It's not right that this should be happening! This is wrong! This is unjust, unfair, and violates our rights!'" (1977, 92) In this manner, the use of values changes the issue from a personal desire or an objective technical matter into a social issue with a moral claim (Gouldner 1970, as quoted in Specter and Kitsuse 1977, 95). This definition could be seen in a cynical way, that the "claims maker" is thinking only about their self-interest but attaches a popular value to their claim solely to win over the audience, rather than as a goal they believe their cause helps. This brings up the question of how people come to believe there is a problem in the first place and how others decide their position on an issue once it has been raised. We can't know whether claims-makers and advocates truly believe their proposals will help the values they espouse or whether those values are being used solely to convince others.

Defining values by how they are used is not at odds with the Schwartz & Bilsky definition. A concept would only be used in a debate if the speaker thinks the target subscribes to that value, likely as a desirable behavior or goal that is applicable to all situations. The Specter and Kitsuse definition is working backwards – when a concept is used a particular way in a communication, you can conclude the speaker believes it's a value to the target.

Stone (2002) examines how values and goals are used in public policy debates and creates a typology of four goal types that are most common: equity, efficiency, security, and liberty. In her view, the concepts are not only goals but are also used as justification for a policy decision or as criteria for evaluating programs. She explores the differing definitions and uses for each goal and the conflicting claims made in its name.

The value of equity is most relevant in “distributive conflicts” in which goods, services or opportunities are distributed (Stone 2002, 39). All sides in the conflict want an “equitable” distribution, but they see that in different ways; equity could mean sameness, or it could mean unequal but fair (Stone 2002). Appeals to equity in public policy debates have been used to refer to equal opportunities, which often requires treating people differently. For example, King County has an “Equity and Social Justice” policy which defines “equity” as a state where “all people have full and equal access to opportunities that enable them to attain their full potential” (King County 2010, 3). Transportation equity is described as “Transportation that provides everyone with safe, efficient, affordable, convenient, and reliable mobility options including public transit, walking, carpooling, and biking” (King County 2010, 3). These statements refer more to equal opportunities than to equal results guaranteed by the government or other parties. If an end goal is for everyone to have equal access to opportunities, but people start out with unequal opportunities (because of differing income levels, for example), one could claim that the situation requires government or other entities to treat people differently, providing more resources to those with less opportunities, in order to level the playing field. Thus, equal opportunity could mean differential distribution of resources.

Stone’s second goal is efficiency, getting more output from a given input. She argues that efficiency is valued not for its own sake, but because it helps us get more of the things we want (Stone 2002). In that line of thinking, if I love bus service and want more of it, I would want to see the transit agency stretch its dollars as far as possible to provide more service. Stone doesn’t mention the flip side:

the desire for less input (frequently money) to get a particular output. This comes up commonly in debates over public services by advocates who desire lower taxes. There are many ways to mobilize the efficiency frame to serve a particular argument. First, efficiency is always comparative; an input/output ratio must be compared to another input/output ratio, such as another organization or the same organization in the past. Advocates can strategically choose a comparison to get the result they want – demonstrating efficiency or demonstrating inefficiency. For example, bus driver wages in Seattle could be compared to bus driver wages in Topeka, Kansas and shown to be high, or compared to wages in a big city and shown to be average. Secondly, a public policy or program may have more than one objective or output; advocates can focus on one objective rather than another to demonstrate efficiency or inefficiency and serve their overall argument. For example, measuring the safety record of bus drivers in unions and not in unions is an output that might be highlighted by union advocates and not by union opponents. Because of these complications in measuring efficiency, it is a value that can be easily manipulated to support various sides of an issue.

The third goal in Stone's list is security, which she describes as fulfilling human needs and wants, including economic, physical, psychological, and military (Stone 2002). "Need is probably the most fundamental political claim" (Stone 2002, 86). Because there is no objective line separating need and want, social actors must convince others that their "need" is legitimate. Stone sees several dimensions of defining needs, including material versus symbolic needs, absolute versus relative, direct versus instrumental, present versus future, and physical versus communal. Through the political process, society decides which needs are real and legitimate.

The fourth of Stone's goals is liberty, which frequently comes up in public policy debates concerning when government should intervene with individual's activities, or, stated another way, when a social goal should override an individual's choice (Stone 2002, 109). John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and others have argued that the only justification for interfering with another's freedom is to prevent harm

to others (Stone 2002, 109). But defining what constitutes a harm and how it ought to be addressed are political struggles.

In addition to these four common goals, Stone sees “community” as the setting for political debates, and contrasts it with the idea of a “market society” composed of competing individuals. The intent of public policy is for a community to achieve something as a community (Stone 2002, 18). The primary conflicts in a community are about what its goals should be and who its members are.

2.6.5 Personal Experience Stories

While values are appealed to in policy debates to generalize a concern, personal stories can be used to make a concern more specific and relatable. Personal stories can help gain the attention of the audience and engage their emotions, often proving more interesting than abstract ideas or dry statistics. As Zoonen (2005) writes, “the personalization and dramatization of political discourse can be more engaging than conventional serious and ‘rational’ political modes of argumentation” (Zoonen 2005, as quoted in Wahl-Jorgensen 2007). Personal stories can make the existing characters in a public policy debate more concrete, specific and real, so that audience members may relate to them. New characters can also be introduced through personal stories – showing who is affected by a problem, for instance, and hearing directly from that person. A personal story about an issue is also an opportunity to provide a new perspective that hasn’t been included in a debate and a way to challenge official “facts.”

Some theorists believe hearing a story of a personal experience can help people consider others’ viewpoints and thus lead to consideration of the public good. The act of sharing an individual experience publicly puts it into the common domain and makes it a resource that others can draw upon (Glasser 1991). A personal story “puts a face on an issue,” creating the ability to put yourself in another

person's shoes and consider what interests you might share (Habermas 1995, 64). Putting yourself in someone else's shoes may be the first step in considering shared interests or the "common good."

Letters to the editor present a possibility for personal stories in public policy debates. Wahl-Jorgensen (2007), in a study of letters to the editor, found that newspaper editors often prioritize publishing letters about personal experiences because they believe readers will relate to stories that "speak from the heart." She believes that stories of personal experience in the media can help people overcome differences, forge bonds, and even strengthen democracy.

2.7 Public Policy Stories

In considering how people debate public policy issues, I've reviewed literature on a variety of techniques for making one's case, including framing, narrative, portrayal of characters, and defining problems, causes, and solutions. Combining this literature, I've developed a framework that most public policy arguments fall into, called a "Public Policy Story" (Figure 1). A public policy story is a strategically framed narrative designed to convince others to support a public policy action. It includes three plot elements: problem, cause, and solution, and three types of characters: victims, villains, and heroes. Persuasive devices such as appeals to values and stories of personal experience are used within the framework or in response to another's public policy story.

Model: Public Policy Story
Strategic narrative designed to persuade the audience to support a policy action

	<i>Plot Elements:</i>	<i>Characters:</i>
Now/ Imminent	<p>1.) Problem - Claim that a situation is harmful</p> <p>Purpose: Get audience to care; portray in a way to lead to preferred solution</p> <p>Strong story:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows impacts to audience values 	<p>Victim - People hurt by the problem</p> <p>Purpose: Get audience to care</p> <p>Strong story:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Portrays victims in sympathetic light Includes stories of personal experience Expands victim group Shows audience how they may be victims
Past/ Now	<p>2.) Cause - What led to the problem</p> <p>Purpose: Connect to preferred solution</p> <p>Strong story: Specific action that led to the problem; connects directly to the solution</p>	<p>Villain - Person or group responsible</p> <p>Purpose: Arouse indignation; demonstrate that human action caused the problem</p> <p>Strong story: Names the person or organization at fault, shows willful intention</p>
Future	<p>3.) Solution - Action that will solve the problem</p> <p>Purpose: Show how the problem can be fixed.</p> <p>Strong story: Specific action identified.</p>	<p>Hero(ine) - Person who can fix the problem</p> <p>Purpose: Put pressure on target, mobilize audience</p> <p>Strong story: Clearly states who has the power to fix the problem</p>

Figure 1

This idea of a public policy story comes from multiple scholars who write about problems, causes and solutions, particularly Stone (1992), Specter and Kitsuse (1977), Entman (1993), Rochefort and Cobb (1993), and Benford and Snow (2000). Entman (1993) defines four functions of framing that coincide with components of a policy story: defining a problem, diagnosing the cause, making moral judgments (on the causal agent and their effects), and suggesting a remedy. Social movement theorists describe a “collective action frame,” comprised of a problem and cause (diagnostic framing), solution (prognostic framing), and call to action.

In my framework, successfully engaging the audience and persuading them to support a desired solution first requires getting their attention. This is done through a dramatic description of the problem and victims, which must relate to values and/or people the target audience is already disposed to care about. The second step is to assert the cause of the problem and the person or organization responsible. The last step is to proclaim the solution and who can bring it about. Policy stories are sometimes told with one or more elements or characters missing, but this generally weakens their effectiveness and persuasiveness. Why does the Public Policy Story begin with the problem rather than with goals or a vision for the future? In the arena of public discourse and debate, policy issues are not usually communicated by starting out with a broad goal or vision for the future – that doesn't grab the audience's attention quickly. Instead, a policy story starts with the problem –a dramatic situation that is relevant to the audience member –to get their attention.

In my analysis I will explore how the texts exhibit some or all of the features of the Policy Story and how they use techniques such as appealing to values within the structure of the story.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

I begin this section with a review of my research question and sub-questions. Because my study consists of examining newspaper texts for communication techniques, I next review the role and background of the media in public policy debates, focusing on editorials, Op-Eds, and letters to the editor, along with a brief background on the Seattle Times newspaper, the site of my study. I then explain my methodology, starting with how I located the texts and my general coding techniques. Finally, I explain my techniques for three types of coding: the presence of values in texts, the presence and strength of public policy stories in six editorials and Op-Eds, and the presence of personal experience stories in letters to the editor.

3.1 Research Question

My research question is: How did select debate participants in Seattle Times texts use framing, policy stories, and other communication techniques in the 2011 King County Metro funding debate?

Now that we have established the framework of a Public Policy Story, the specific sub-questions I will investigate are:

- How did debate participants in Seattle Times Editorials, Op-Eds, and letters to the editor use values appeals in their attempts to persuade the audience to support or oppose the Congestion Reduction Charge?
- Did persuasive messages in Editorials and Op-Eds follow the framework of the Public Policy Story, with three plot components of problem, cause, and solution and three character types of victim, villain, and hero?
- How were stories of personal experience used in the debate? Were they paired with appeals to values? Were these stories used to portray characters in the public policy story?

To answer these questions I focus on a specific site of public debate, namely the news articles, letters to the editor, Op-Eds, and editorials published online and in print in the Seattle Times. I chose this site to examine this public policy debate because it is both read by a relatively wide audience while being of a size and format manageable for my analysis.

3.2 The Media as a Site for Social Action

I have considered the use of framing in the news media above. Now I will briefly delve into related issues about newspaper opinion articles (Editorials, Op-Eds, and letters to the editor), including their influence and the context of these forums. I chose to analyze texts in the news media (as opposed to speeches, ordinances, or other types of texts) because the media is a key source of information and a

prime forum for public discourse and debate on contemporary public policy issues. As Wahl-Jorgensen (2007) writes, citizens in contemporary democracies don't participate directly in politics, making the mass media the site where political life takes place. This site has a particular context, with norms, and power relationships that should be considered when examining a debate in the media.

Editorials and Op-Eds

Several studies have considered whether newspaper editorials influence public opinion and or public policy; most have not found evidence that editorials directly cause changes in readers' opinions or in public policy. For example, Habel (2012), in a study of Congressional votes from 1956 to 2006, found that editorials in the New York Times and Wall Street Journal did not cause changes in Congressional policy positions. Davis and Rarick (1964) theorized that editorials are effective at stimulating a public debate in letters to the editor, but not in changing opinions. Hynds (1984) found that editors believe editorials influence public opinion, primarily through assisting people in making judgments or reinforcing opinions already held, rather than changing readers' minds. Ladd and Lenz (2009) have one of the few studies showing a causal link; they found newspaper editorials persuaded 10-25% of readers to vote for the UK Labour Party in the 1997 election.

Op-Eds in daily newspapers became common after appearing in the September 21, 1970 publication of the New York Times (Day and Golan 2005). Short for "opposite the editorial page", they are opinion pieces written by guests and were designed to bring new opinions to the editorial section (Shiple 2004). Several studies have investigated what types of authors and subjects tend to get published in Op-Eds. Song (2004), in an analysis of Washington Post and Washington Times Op-Eds in the 1990s, found that authors were most often think tank representatives, public officials, journalists, and academics. Sommer and Maycroft (2008), in an analysis of Op-Eds in the New York Times, Wall

Street Journal and New Jersey Star-Ledger in 2006, found that agreement with the editorial page was one of the keys to getting an Op-Ed published.

I included Op-Eds in my study because they were a substantial part of the debate on the Congestion Reduction Charge that took place within the Seattle Times.

Letters to the Editor

A large proportion of the texts in this study are letters to the editor, and it's important to consider who writes letters to the editor, how letters get chosen for publication, and their role in public policy debates. Some theorists from the 1960s and 70s explored why letters to the editor were not studied more widely. Buell (1975) argues that social scientists have not paid much attention to letters to the editor because the writers are regarded as "emotionally unstable, numerically insignificant, methodologically troublesome, and, most damning of all, theoretically uninteresting" and because of the "conventional view of letter-writers as cranks who chronically vent their emotions in public" (Buell 1975, 440). Davis and Rarick (1964) describe one function of letters to the editor as catharsis: "The letter column gives the irate, the antagonist, the displeased a chance to speak out and be heard" (Davis and Rarick 1964, 109). If these sentiments ring true, perhaps letters to the editor should be studied as a sort of pathology.

For a different view, Wahl-Jorgensen (2007) argues that letters to the editor represent an idea that citizens can use the news media to participate in community debates. She finds the letters section to be an ideal of "deliberative democracy" with a forum for public debate. San Francisco Chronicle editorial page editor John Diaz (2013) finds that the letters section has several benefits to society, including "the opportunity for personal perspectives that force readers with very different life experiences to consider another viewpoint."

Several studies have found that letter writers are not demographically representative of the general population, but are older, wealthier, and better educated (Forsythe 1950; Reader 2004). Buell (1975) found that letters writers were much more politically active than the general population. However, despite not being demographically representative, some studies have found that the positions of published letters on controversial policy issues roughly matches public opinion (Hill 1981; Sigelman 1992). Of course, published letters are a function not just of who chooses to write, but of who editors choose to publish. Wahl-Jorgensen (2007) studied newspaper editors' views of letters to the editor and their selection process. She found several patterns editors follow: editors give lower priority to letters by activists; prefer emotional letters likely to generate a response; and favor personal stories that others can relate to.

It is difficult to understand the role of the letters section in public debates and understandings because direct causal evidence is hard to come by. However, some studies have suggested the letters section is frequently read and can influence news coverage. Hynds (1984) found that half of surveyed newspaper editors thought the letters section the best-read item on the editorial page. Pritchard and Berkowitz (1991) found evidence that letters to the editor influenced news coverage and editorials in some newspapers. Dearden (1986) found that letters to the editor influenced a public policy decision, leading in one case to the cancellation of an herbicide program in British Columbia by changing the issue from a problem of weed infestation to a problem of unsafe herbicides, as seen by the public and decision makers.

While we cannot assume that letters to the editor are representative of the larger population or demonstrably influence public policy, they provide a wider view of how people debate public policy issues, as opposed to authors of editorials and Op-Eds or officials quoted in news articles. As such they are an important part of this study.

The Seattle Times

Because my study is on texts from the Seattle Times, the paper's role in the media and policy landscape of King County is worth noting. After the Seattle Post-Intelligencer ceased print publication in 2009, the Seattle Times became the only major daily newspaper in the Seattle area. Owned by the Blethen family since the late 19th century, the Times' average weekday readership is 575,000, out of a population of five million in the "designated market area" (Seattle Times Media Kit). The Times' readership is both wealthier (average household income of \$87,000) and better educated (43% are college-educated adults) than the general population (Seattle Times Media Kit). In addition to local news reporting, the Times runs editorials, Op-Eds, columns, and letters to the editor. The Times' self-described criteria for publishing letters to the editor, in addition to length and contact information, includes "clarity of thought, response to current events, and the graceful art of letter writing" (Seattle Times). It also claims to give preference to opinions not already presented in the editorial pages and to critics of the paper (Seattle Times).

As the only major daily newspaper in the Seattle area, the Seattle Times plays a large role in public policy debates, a major reason it is the focus of my study. But we must remember that its readership is not representative of the wider population and thus does not influence everyone equally.

3.3 Locating Texts

I chose to use texts from the Seattle Times that dealt with the Congestion Reduction Charge (CRC or "transit fee") during the period of debate. This time period stretched from June 19, 2011, when the Seattle Times first reported on the County Executive's proposal, to the final opinion articles in the Times responding to the County Council vote, on August 15th. I used the Seattle Times because it is the most prominent, regional, widely mass media outlet about public policy debates in King County; I limited myself to one source to make the project manageable. All texts in the Seattle Times that referred to the

CRC were included for analysis, with the exception of several articles that only briefly mentioned the CRC and were primarily on other subjects; this included three news article about County Council races. I used the NewsBank archive to search for texts, using the following search terms: “car tab” “transit” and “tax” “Metro” and “bus”. I ended up with a total of 50 texts for analysis, including eight news articles, 34 letters to the editor, three Op-Eds, three Editorials, one blog post, and one column.

3.4 General Coding

I listed each text in a spreadsheet and entered basic information, including title, author, date, and type of text (letter to the editor, news article, editorial, Op-Ed, column, or blog). I then coded each text for position on CRC (for, against, neutral, or not applicable); all news stories were coded as not applicable. The case included fifty texts total, of which thirty-four were letters to the editor, eight were news articles, three were Editorials, three were Op-Eds, one was a blog post, and one was a column, as shown in Figure 2.

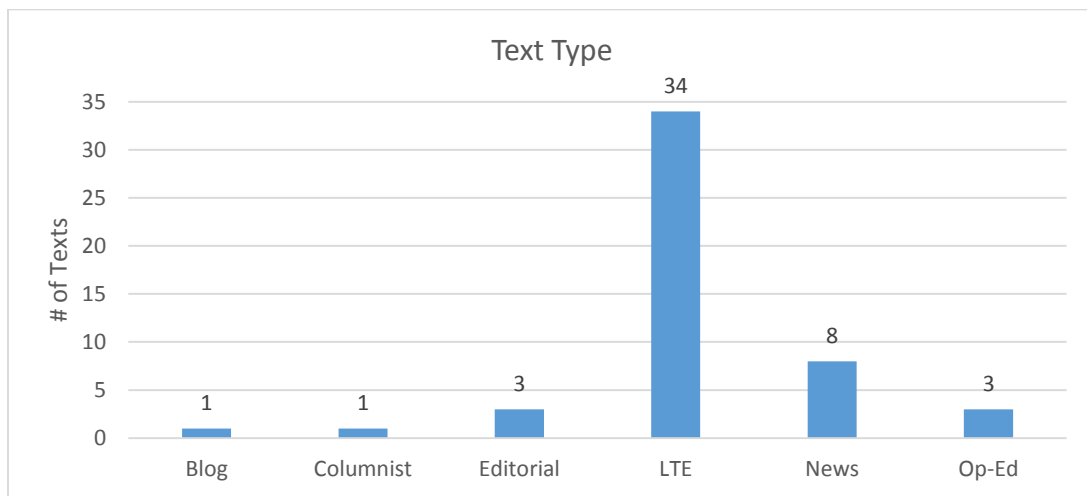


Figure 2

Twenty-seven of the fifty texts were in support of the transit fee, eleven were opposed, eight were news stories, and four were neutral, as shown in Figure 3.

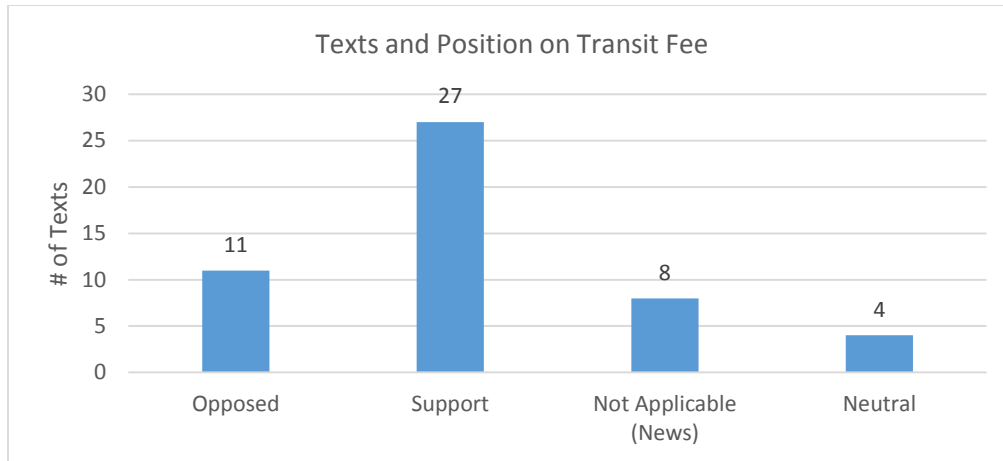


Figure 3

3.5 Values

I coded each text to identify the values used to support an argument for or against the transit fee, using the definitions above. I defined “values” as beliefs about preferred goals or behaviors that are applied universally and influence actions and evaluation of actions. I placed similar values into broader categories and ranked the most common categories. It’s important to note that I did not count the number of instances a value was appealed to overall in this case, but instead the number of texts that included each value. If a text had one mention of fairness or ten mentions, it would still be coded as just one text with the value fairness. This was done due to time constraints and to make analysis more manageable.

3.6 Policy Stories

I analyzed the six longer opinion texts (Op-Eds and editorials), to see if they matched the framework of a policy story consisting of a plot with three parts – problem, cause, and solution – and three sets of characters – victims, villains, and heroes. I analyzed the strength of each plot component and character, and then analyzed how the policy stories interacted with each other. In each text, I

looked for statements about something being wrong or undesirable. The undesirable situation was coded as a stronger problem if the consequences of the situation were described, if the people impacted by the problem were described, and if there was an appeal to values or interests. I identified when more than one situation could be interpreted as the problem. The victim character was coded as strong if specific people or groups impacted by the problem were described, particularly in a sympathetic light.

Once I identified a problem, I looked for a description or assumption of what was causing the problem. Frequently the text included more than one cause; in those cases I listed each potential cause. I labeled it a stronger causal story if a specific person or organization was identified as responsible for the problem. If the cause was specific and linked to the solution it was also coded as strong. I identified the desired policy goal in each text and labeled it as the solution. I identified the hero(ine) by who was stated as having the power to fix the problem or who had already helped to partially fix the problem. Sometimes this was not stated directly, and in these cases I hypothesized potential heroes.

3.7 Personal Experience Stories

Personal stories can appear in the media in several ways, including news reporting and letters to the editor. I chose to use only those texts with a first-person story of personal experience; this eliminated news articles as well as the Op-Eds and Editorials (which did not include first-person stories). I made this choice because I felt the first-person stories had more depth than the short descriptions in news articles. I coded each text for whether it included a story of personal experience, meaning the author or speaker referenced something from their own life.

3.8 Analysis Outline

The analysis that follows consists of three parts: values, policy stories, and personal experience stories. I first examine which values were appealed to most frequently throughout all fifty texts in my case, including editorials, Op-Eds, letters to the editor, and news articles. As described above, appeals to values are used in a policy debate to win others to one's side, and are generally woven throughout a Public Policy Story. I next take a close look at each of the six Op-Eds and Editorials in this case, examining each for the presence of a Public Policy Story that follows my framework, including plot components, character portrayals, and value appeals. Last I examine how stories of personal experience were used in letters to the editor to bolster arguments for or against the transit fee.

CHAPTER 4: VALUES ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned above, I defined “values” as beliefs about preferred goals or behaviors that are applied universally and influence actions and evaluation of actions. In this case, each side appealed to broad societal values in attempting to convince readers to support their position. But the values used most commonly were not exactly the same on each side of the debate or in different types of texts. Here I will review the values used most commonly, exploring each individually and then examine patterns among them. The most common values found in the texts are shown in Figure 4. Efficiency was used in by far the largest number of texts in this debate, followed by the economy, reducing traffic congestion, trust, equity, and fairness. The headings I have used for each value, such as “efficiency” or “the economy” are shorthand for the beliefs; for example “the economy” refers to a goal of having a strong economy.

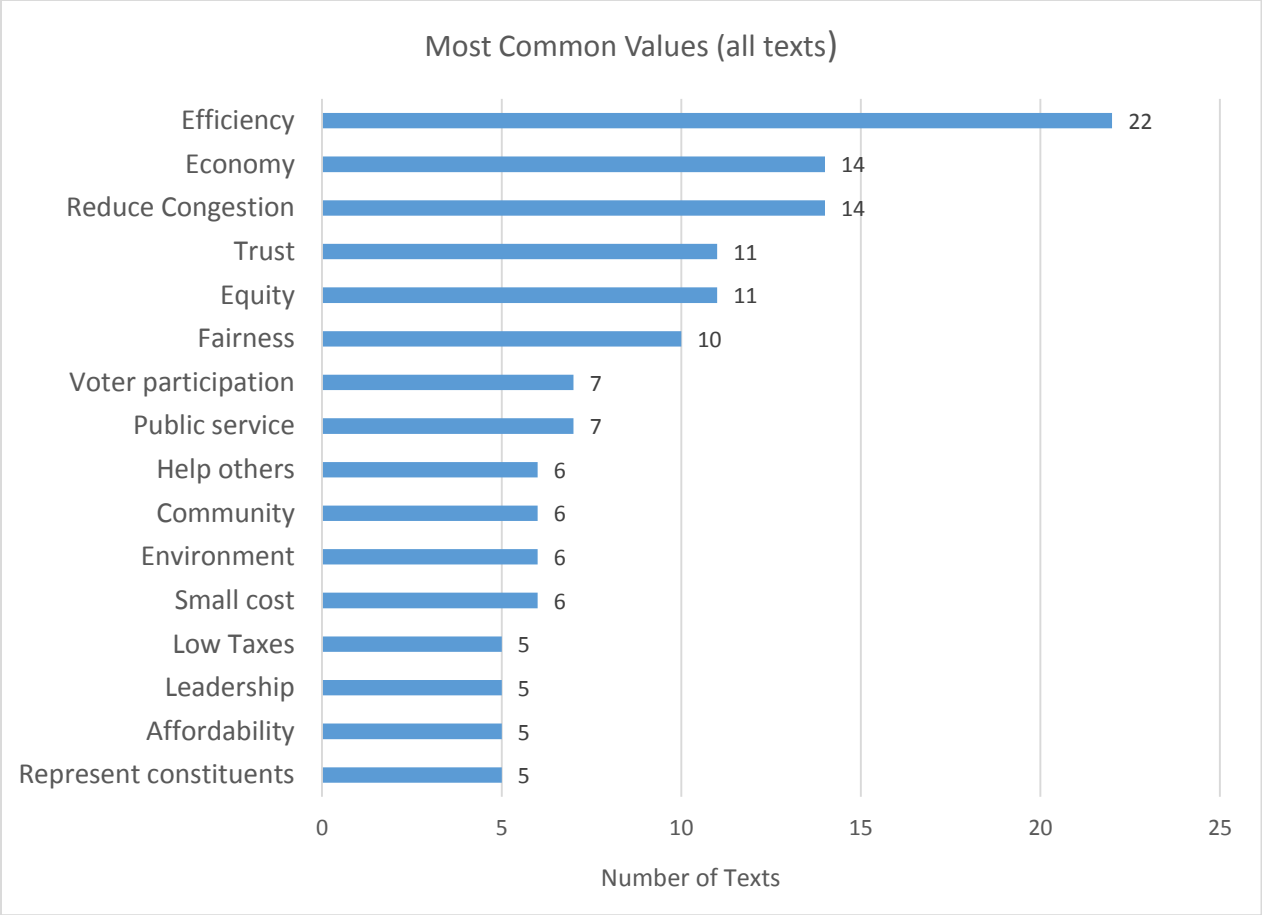


Figure 4

In the texts supporting the CRC, reducing traffic congestion was the value present in the largest number of texts, followed by efficiency, equity, and public service (see Figure 5).

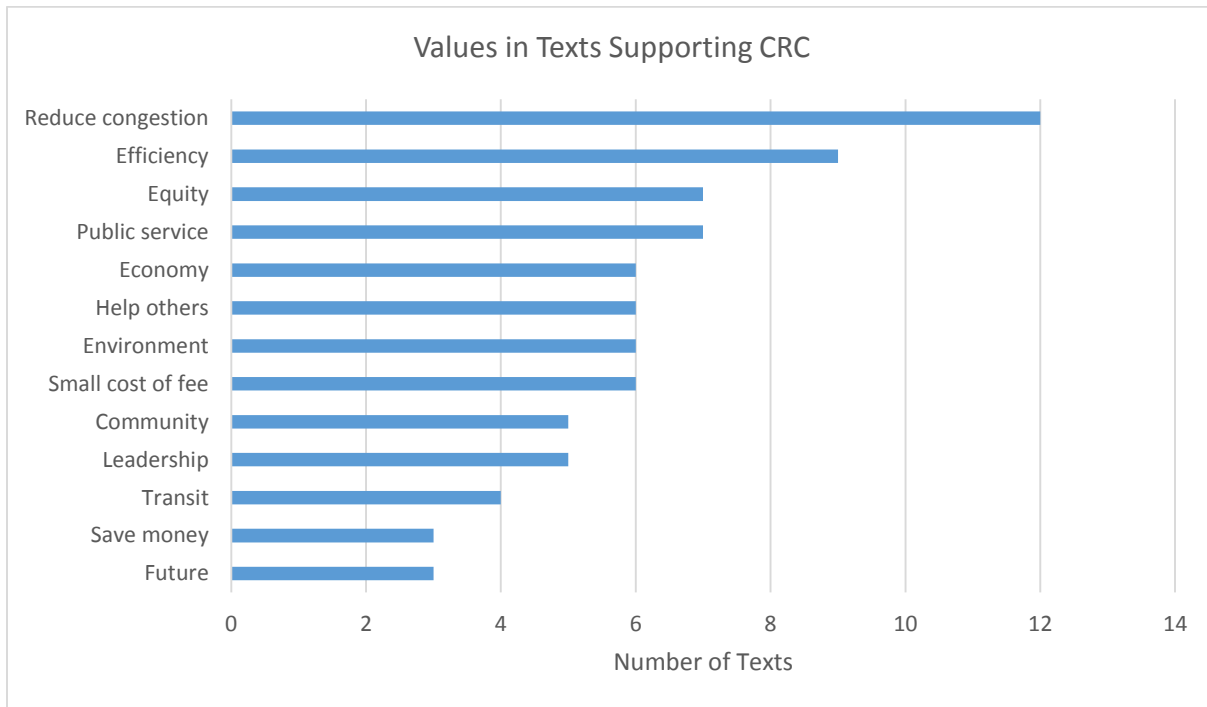


Figure 5

In texts opposing the CRC, fairness, trust, the economy, efficiency, and low taxes were most common, as shown in Figure 6.

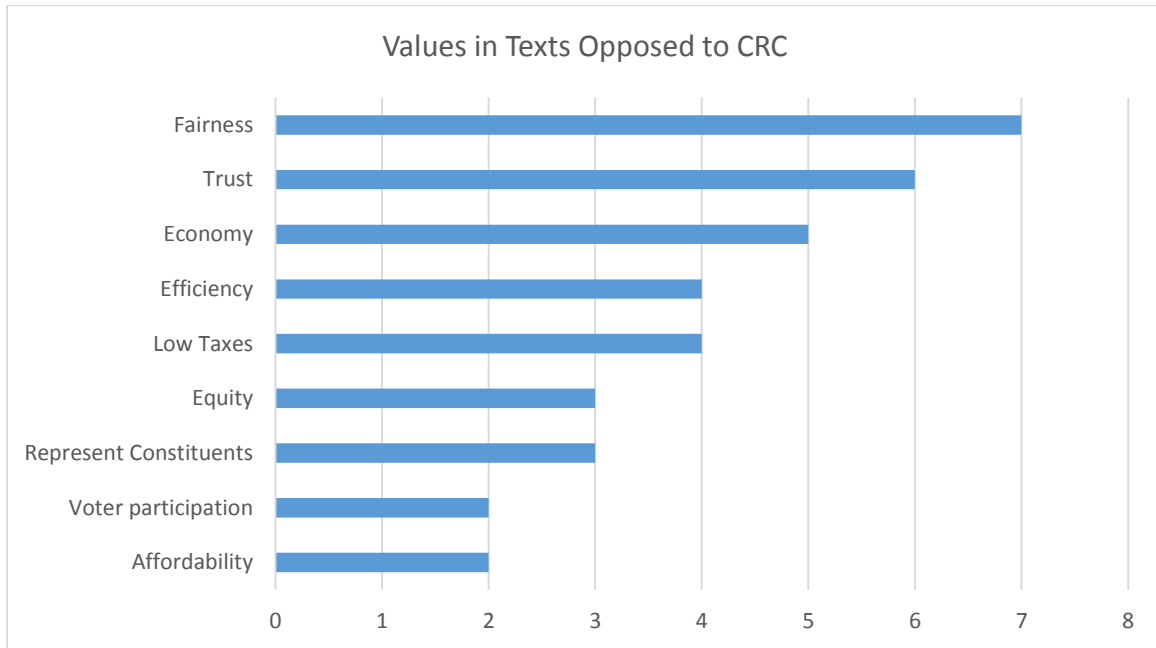


Figure 6

In news articles, efficiency was most common, followed by voter participation and trust, as shown in Figure 7.

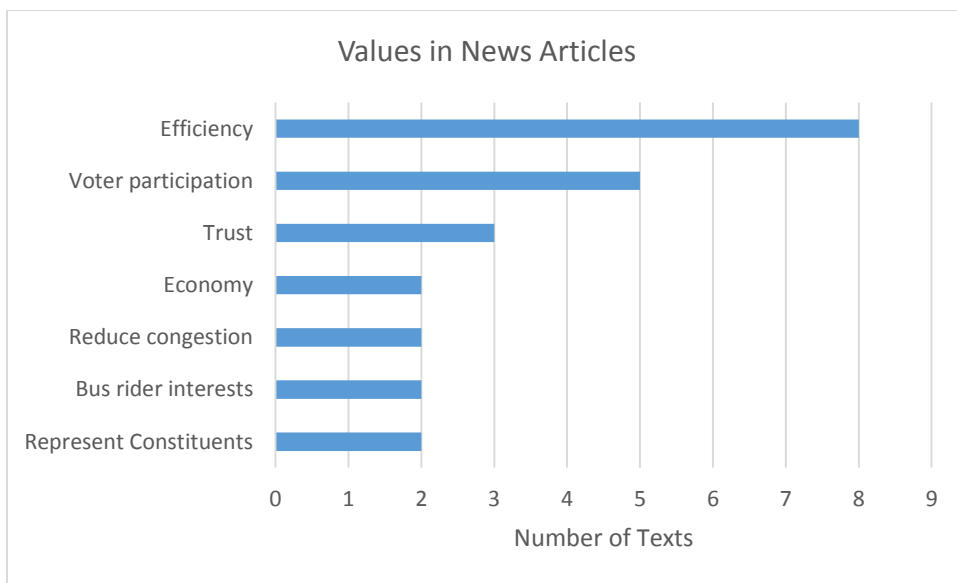


Figure 7

In examining which values were used in which texts, I found that several values were used only in letters to the editor and not in Op-Eds, Editorials, or news articles. Figure 8 shows values present in at least three texts and the proportion of texts that were letters to the editor for each.

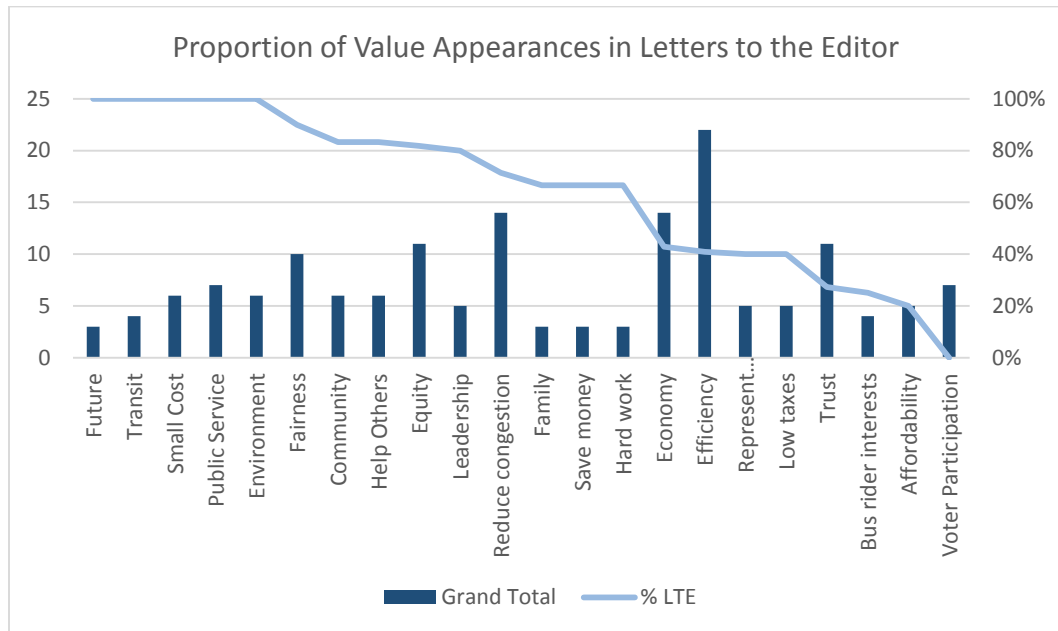


Figure 8

We can see that five values –the future, transit, the small cost of the fee, public service, and the environment – were used only in letters to the editor. Meanwhile the value of voter participation (putting policy issues to a public vote) was not present in any letters to the editor. Although we cannot view letters as being representative of the broader public, this still provides a contrast in what values “elites” such as public officials, business leaders, or editorial board members appeal to versus what letter writers are appealing to. We could speculate that elites are more likely to use values they believe are broadly popular, such as the economy, whereas letter writers may use the values that they themselves find most important. For example, for some letter writers, protecting the environment is a key goal. Yet that was not mentioned in the two Op-Eds supporting the fee, perhaps because those

writers did not believe it would be convincing to large numbers of readers. Likewise, the value of fairness, used primarily by letter writers to say it was unfair for them to subsidize bus riders, was almost never used in the Op-Ed and editorials opposing the fee. While not necessarily representative of the broader public, these patterns may tell us which values are most important or used most by members of the public who feel most strongly about the issue and are therefore most likely to write in.

Now I examine the most common values, including how they were used and their place in the public policy story. In three cases I've chosen to group values together for analysis because of common patterns or noteworthy contrasts.

4.2 Efficiency

Efficiency was present in 22 of 50 texts and all eight news articles, primarily in relation to the management of King County Metro. Opponents of the fee labeled Metro as inefficient in two ways: paying bus drivers too much and running bus routes without many riders. For fee opponents, Metro's inefficiency was the heart of the cause in this policy story: Metro, the villain, violated the value of efficiency, which led directly to Metro's deficit and the tax proposal (the problem). Fee opponents, including the Seattle Times editorial board, Op-Ed author Michael Ennis, and several letter writers, focused on Metro's alleged inefficiency as a reason to stop the transit fee.

As mentioned in the literature review, Deborah Stone argues that efficiency is not valued for its own sake, but because it helps us get more of the things we want (2002, 61). If that were the case in this debate, we might expect bus riders and fee proponents to be the strongest advocates for Metro efficiency, because they have the most to gain – more and better bus service for the same amount of money. However, bus proponents did not call for greater efficiency at Metro during this debate. Their primary message was that Metro already was efficient, and therefore that was not a reason to stop the

fee. Perhaps bus supporters had greater trust in Metro that it had done everything possible to become more efficient, and therefore the only way to preserve bus service was the fee.

Efficiency as a concept is always relational, in comparison to something else. In this debate, the critique of Metro's efficiency included comparisons to transit systems in other cities around the country. Metro was said to have the third highest bus driver pay in the country; however this was countered by bus drivers who stated that when cost of living was taken into account, Metro bus drivers have the 17th highest wages. Clearly sides in a debate can use numbers and comparisons in ways to build the strongest case for their position. In addition to comparing Metro to other agencies, debate participants might invite the audience to compare bus driver wages to their own, by stating how much the drivers earn, as the Seattle Times did in its 7/24/11 editorial. If I read that the top wage for a bus driver is \$28.47 per hour and I earn less than that, I may feel that the wage is unfair and that government is inefficient. Efficiency was also compared to times in the past, when the Seattle Times 7/24/11 editorial stated that bus driver wages had risen 37% in the previous decade. This statement doesn't tell us what bus drivers made before that time period, how those wages compared nationally, or any other background information. But a reader could compare that rate of increase with their own wages over that time period and decide the drivers are paid too much.

Stone argues that while everyone supports the general idea of efficiency, there are conflicts over how the costs and values are measured. For example, the cost and value of a low-ridership bus route could be compared to the public cost of providing paratransit for disabled passengers, which might make that route look quite efficient. Or it could be compared to the cost of transit-dependent populations being stranded at home and unable to get to work or appointments (though this would be difficult to measure).

While efficiency was mentioned most often in relation to the management of King County Metro, others appealed to efficiency in relation to a ballot measure (argued to be a waste of time and money), and in relation to road space allocation (transit being more efficient use of space than cars).

Others challenged the definition or importance of efficiency. For example, Don Bliss wrote:

The argument from Michael Ennis on the editorial page July 22 that “Car-tab hike would fuel bus system’s inefficiency” turns the real meaning of the word “efficiency” on its head. If “efficiency” were our goal, we’d ban automobiles and force everyone onto buses or bicycles. Where’s the efficiency in having a strong police department when crime rates go down? It’s bad enough to be limiting library hours. When will folks begin to understand that government shouldn’t always or even usually serve the public “efficiently”? [7/25/11]

Letter-writer Josh Fredman questioned the goal of efficiency for public transit, writing, “Public transit is not supposed to be a profit engine. It is supposed to move people throughout our metropolis. To do that, there must be frequent service everywhere, all day long.” [7/24/11] However, while the meaning of efficiency was contested by a few debate participants, primarily through letters to the editor, the primary use of the value Efficiency was to attack or defend Metro, arguing whether the agency was efficient or not.

4.3 The Economy

A strong economy was used as a reason to support or oppose the fee in 14 of the 50 texts. There were three sub-arguments: 1.) The fee would hurt the economy in general; 2.) The fee would hurt individuals during a recession; and 3.) Cutting bus service would harm the economy. The term was not defined precisely; it might refer to jobs, business profits, or other measures of economic growth or contraction. Examples of language used by fee opponents to mobilize the economy value, which focused on the impact of taxes include:

“Car-owning families also have other critical family needs, and taxing them could also derail our economic recovery.” [7/19/11 “Car owners have other needs.”]

“Few experts believe in the wisdom of raising taxes — or fees — in a recession and this one is relentless.” [7.14 “Ballots overloaded with taxes, fees”]

Fee supporters focused on how congestion hurts the economy:

“We do not need a major blow to our transportation system that could delay or derail our much-needed economic recovery.” [7/18/11 “King County Council should enact \$20 vehicle fee now to save Metro bus service.”]

“Congestion is a substantial drag on the economy. Using the outdated fuel cost of \$2.73 per gallon, the Mobility Report calculated that the area's truck congestion alone cost \$659 million in 2009 — equivalent to 1,500 family jobs.” [7/23/11 “County should approve vehicle fee to preserve Metro Transit service.”]

A strong economy fits my definition of a value – a preferred goal that is universally applied and influences actions. The actors in this debate assumed that a healthy economy is a universal goal and should influence actions like taxes or transportation policy. But convincing people that the fee would hurt the economy or that congestion caused by not enacting the fee would hurt the economy might be difficult. To relate to Stone’s typology of four key goals in policy debates, I would place the economy in the needs section, relating most commonly, if unspoken, to the need for a job and economic security.

4.4 Reduce Traffic Congestion

The goal of reducing traffic congestion was appealed to in 14 of the 50 texts, including 12 of the 27 opinion articles in support of the fee. None of the opinion articles opposing the fee mentioned traffic congestion. Fee supporters assumed that car drivers in their audience value reduced traffic congestion and used that as part of their argument in the problem section. Convincing drivers that their commute would be longer if buses are cut (problem) is an attempt to broaden the group of people impacted by bus cuts (the victim group). One example of an advocate using the value of reduced traffic congestion:

“Each weekday, more than 360,000 people ride Metro. On average, each bus in the afternoon peak carries 39 passengers. Imagine 39 more cars on the road per bus. Now multiply those extra cars by the thousands of hours of impending service cuts.” [7/23/11 “County should approve vehicle fee to preserve Metro Transit service.”]

Reducing traffic congestion generally fits my definition of a “value” - a belief about preferred goals or behaviors that is universally applied and influences actions. People generally want to get to destinations in a fast and predictable way. But fast travel might not be a goal that is applied universally to all situations and used to judge actions. However, we could assume that underlying the goal of traffic congestion is a broader and deeper goal such as freedom and opportunity, goals people would apply in all situations.

Reducing traffic congestion could fit in two of Stone’s primary goals. Less congestion means faster travel, which could be seen as a form of efficiency. As Stone says, we value efficiency because it provides more of what we want at less cost; for reduced congestion, we get more travel distance at a cost of less time (and stress). Secondly, reduced congestion could fit in the category of Liberty. Being “stuck” in traffic means being constricted, although not by a government agent in this case, as is often described in other cases.

4.5 Equity and Fairness

Fairness, which I define as equal treatment and contrast later to “equity”, was a major value theme in the debate, particularly from letter writers who owned cars and opposed the transit fee. This value was present in ten texts, of which nine were letters to the editor (the other was an editorial) and seven were anti-fee. Most text authors stated that requiring them to subsidize other people was unfair. Some implied that they could not afford it or that bus riders did not need a subsidy and should pay for the service themselves. They all stated that there was no justifiable reason for a transfer of resources. The appeal to fairness was generally used to bolster the problem description – the tax is the problem, it hurts them (the authors) personally, and it’s wrong because it violates the principle of fairness.

Examples of the use of fairness:

"He wants all of us who drive vehicles to pay for bus service whether we use it or not." (6/23/11 "Vehicle drivers shouldn't pay.")

"The proposed car tab is unfair. Tax the people who can and do use the service, or tax only the areas where the service is provided... I have no option but to drive my car. To tax me is unfair because Metro does not provide an option for me. If the tax goes through, we will be held victims. We have no recourse and no alternative. This is once again an example of how King County ignores the rural citizens." (6/24/11 "Fare unfair")

"...don't raise fees and punish people who prefer to drive the cars they worked hard to buy." [6/27/11 "Enough is enough"]

"Why should car owners have to subsidize people who are saving a small fortune riding the bus by not buying and maintaining a car, buying gasoline and insurance, and paying for parking downtown? Let the riders pay more of the true cost." [7/19/11 "Car owners have other needs."]

Fee supporters countered this appeal to fairness by appealing to the self-interest of car drivers, asserting that transit reduces traffic congestion. Some car owners who supported the fee emphasized that they owned a car and would have to pay and still supported the fee, perhaps as a way to lend credibility to that argument.

While I defined "fairness" as equal treatment, I define equity as equal opportunity. In this debate, both supporters and opponents of the fee appealed to the value of equity and equal opportunity by pointing out the needs of people with fewer opportunities, mostly low-income people. This was used more frequently by fee supporters (equity was present in 7 of 27 texts supporting the fee), usually asserting that some bus riders do not have other options for transportation and therefore it's a public duty to support them. Examples of appeals to equity:

"We cannot afford to buy a car in order to make our lives more convenient. We need Metro service to live our day-to-day lives." [6/20/11 "Metro helps us."]

"Isn't it coldhearted to remove decades-old bus routes, stranding thousands of poor, old and disabled regular bus riders who rely on these routes?" [7/19/11 "Impact of Cuts"]

"We all know elderly, youth, students, low-income and disabled friends and neighbors who need the bus, and none of us wants service cut. The people who serve us at the mall, in restaurants, at the movies, clean our offices, and cook and clean for us in hospitals and nursing homes may not make enough money to own cars and pay for car insurance." [7/23/11 "County should approve vehicle fee to preserve Metro Transit service."]

Some fee opponents used the equity claim (present in three of eleven anti-fee texts), stating that the fee would hurt low-income individuals who own cars, some of whom had no choice but to drive.

I grouped fairness and equity together because they are on their face similar values and both relate to the place of individuals in society. But we can see that in this debate they were used to support opposite courses of action. Fairness was seen as a reason not to impose the fee on car owners and thus transfer resources from car owners to bus riders – unequal treatment. Equity was seen as a reason for the fee, because ostensibly bus riders do not have equal opportunities and so should be subsidized (although the argument was not stated in exactly those words).

4.6 Political Representation

The values of trust, voter participation, leadership, and representing constituents are distinct concepts and I coded them separately, but I have grouped them together here for analysis because they all relate to how public policy decisions are made. This category of values was present throughout the debate, focusing on whether public officials were trustworthy and representing their constituents and whether there should be a public vote or Council vote on the fee. These generally fit my definition of values (a belief about preferred goals or behaviors that is universally applied and influences actions). Certainly being trustworthy is a widespread goal in our culture, as is the idea that elected officials should be strong leaders and represent their constituents well. The goal of “voters having a say” (or “voter participation”) was used by some participants in this debate as though it was a broad goal

is something that some would apply universally. These values do not fit well into Stone’s typology of common goals in public policy debates (efficiency, equity, security, and liberty) perhaps because they are more focused on process issues in a democracy and personal characteristics (like leadership and being trustworthy).

Trust, more frequently distrust, of government officials was brought up regularly by fee opponents, who stated or implied that politicians and Metro could not be trusted and therefore should not be given more money through a new tax. This value was present in eleven texts – six opposing the fee, one supporting the fee, one neither, and three news articles. The Seattle Times editorial board showed distrust in government in its first editorial (6/30/11), both skeptical of politicians raising taxes in general and of the claim this fee would be temporary:

“Taxes go up in bad years because times are bad and good years because we can afford it. There has to be a stopping point. Given the economic pain, the public opposition and the unbelievable claim that the \$20 tax is for two years only, this is a good time to say no.”

Fee supporters did not usually defend the integrity of public officials, but instead listed facts and figures to explain why the tax was necessary. One of the few writers who exhibited trust in Metro was letter writer Kathleen Dunn (7/11/11):

“Metro is implementing audit recommendations for reducing costs. However, when sales-tax revenue is down and fuel prices are up for three years running, they must meet operating expenses somehow.”

An issue related to trust of public officials is whether officials are accurately and faithfully representing their constituents. This value was present in five texts, three anti-fee opinion articles and two news stories. Fee opponents stating that County Executive Dow Constantine or others were not doing a good job of representing constituents. This could be considered part of a broad value of a representative democracy. Elizabeth Jourdan wrote (6/25/11):

“Dow Constantine hasn’t got a clue about the people he represents in King County. He has not kept his promises pre-election to his present position. He’s a Democrat, but he does not feel for the middle- and low-income citizens or the seniors he represents.”

A related issue was a debate between direct voter decisions at the ballot versus leadership and decisions made by elected officials. The value of voter participation was present in seven texts, generally by fee opponents in opinion articles or quoted in news stories. For example:

“Dunn said after the meeting he could see no scenario in which he would bypass voters to enact the fee.” [7/26/11 “County Council postpones vote on \$20 car-tab fee to help Metro”]

“If the package is so good,” von Reichbauer said after the vote, “why are we denying the public the right to vote?” [8/16/11 “County Oks \$20 car-tab fee increase to save bus service.”]

Some fee supporters appealed to the value of leadership to counter the public vote argument, stating that it’s the job of elected officials to weigh all concerns and make a tough decision. For example, Fred May wrote (8/16/11):

“I certainly don’t have all of the information to make complex trade-offs on public services. That is why we elect representatives. I may not always agree with their decisions, but I expect them to make decisions and not refer everything to the voters. That only leads to paralysis.”

The prevalence of this set of values in this debate shows that distrust in government and public officials is a hot and resonant topic. One side of the debate strongly felt that public officials cannot be trusted and in this case were not faithfully representing their constituents. This distrust extends to the ostensible need for the public to vote on the fee. The counter to this line of argument was appeals to the value of leadership: that strong leaders do what they believe in. These values played out primarily in the “villain” part of the Policy Story – whether public officials were a villain and caused the problem or not.

4.7 Civic Virtue

The values of “public service,” “community,” and “helping others,” which I’ve grouped together in a category of “civic virtue,” were appealed to in several texts, generally in support of the transit fee. Seven letters to the editor spoke of public services as a value. Most of these were countering the efficiency frame of the Seattle Times editorial. Rather than efficiency, they argued that the goal of public transit is to provide something to the public, and contrasted Metro with private industry. For example, Ward Folsom wrote (7/11/11): “If King County Metro were a private company, they would

send buses only to high-demand areas. They would be in business to make money. Metro is not in that business. They are in the business of getting folks where they need to go.” Likewise, Josh Fredman wrote (7/24/11): “Public transit is not supposed to be a profit engine. It is supposed to move people throughout our metropolis.” Of Stone’s typology of values in public debates, this would seem to fit into security (defining a need for the public – such as mobility) and also her concept of “community” where people decide on goals together.

The value of “community,” doing what’s best for everyone in society together, was appealed to in six texts. For example, Jerome Chroman wrote (6/27/11): “I prefer all of us contributing to the good of the community by pulling together.” And Mark Borghorst wrote (7/10/11): “I have long voted for school levies, even though I have never had children, and for transit long before I drove a bus. I voted for police and firefighters, senior-citizen issues — the list goes on. I did, and continue to do so, because my sense of community extends beyond the end of the nose on my face.” Bette Reed wrote (7/21/11): “...in these very tough times it would seem to me we need to pull together. Since Metro knits our community together, the neighborly thing for car owners to do is think of all those who make it to work on time or see their doctors or get to class because they ponied up to the \$20 bucks.”

Fee skeptic and Seattle Times columnist Joni Balter agreed with the value of community but then posed a counter to it, of efficiency and trust in government (7/14/11):

“I like buses, schools, schoolchildren, crater-free roads, sturdy bridges and so on. But what about keeping the place affordable for all those people who can’t keep up with existing taxes and looming rate increases for basic necessities? That’s also a community good... Seattle and King County voters are extremely generous with tax and fee dollars. This is a place where people really do believe in — and put their money into — community building. Usually, the only time they say no is when there is an aggravating factor. Remember King County’s request last year for a sales-tax increase to pay for public safety. What likely killed that were news stories about sheriff deputies receiving 5 percent annual raises for five years, something that shouted “disconnect” to many in the private sector.”

Six texts used the concept of helping others as a value and justification for supporting a position. For example, Mary Meister wrote (7/18/11): “This is not the time to cut funding for public

transportation. People need to look for jobs, find jobs and get to those jobs, and we are trying to make it harder for them.” The word “need” matches up with Stone’s conception of security being one of the fundamental goals used in public policy debates. In this case the writer uses the need of employment and connects that to needing public transportation. In a similar vein, Jerry Wheeler wrote (8/2/11): “A lot of people with low-paying jobs cannot afford a car, and the bus is their only way to get around.” Another author, Paul Bachtel, wrote of the needs of others and attempted to create a relationship between the audience and these folks – saying we all know these people who “need” public transit:

“We all know elderly, youth, students, low-income and disabled friends and neighbors who need the bus, and none of us wants service cut. The people who serve us at the mall, in restaurants, at the movies, clean our offices, and cook and clean for us in hospitals and nursing homes may not make enough money to own cars and pay for car insurance. If late-night service is cut, how many will either drive without insurance or lose their jobs?” [7/23/11]

This value is very similar to the equity value, but has less of a “rights” orientation and more of a focus on voluntary help to others who are less fortunate.

This combination of values used primarily by fee supporters – public service, community, and helping others – was a strong counter to the efficiency focus of fee opponents. In some ways these values get to the deeper reasons behind supporting public transit – connection to others – than simply reducing traffic. These values also speak to a positive role for government, as opposed to the fee opponents were focused on bashing government. This side focused on why government exists (a public service) and the good it can do for people.

4.8 Environment

Protecting the environment was a value appealed to in six texts, all letters to the editor supporting the CRC. It was often paired with the goal of reducing traffic congestion, both of which were described as benefits from public transit. For example, Eileen Birge wrote (7/3/11) “Reliable and

frequent bus service is key to convincing people to get out of their cars and use public transportation, which reduces both traffic and pollution.” The value of a clean environment was occasionally traded off against the cost of the fee, for example in Kathleen Dunn’s letter (7/11/11): “Half a percent of my cars’ value per year plus insurance is a small price to pay to help control gridlock and reduce pollution.” Similarly, Sarah Weinberg wrote (7/3/11): “I don’t care if the annual \$20 car-tab tax is forever, or even if it gets raised in future years. For the good of all of us, never mind cleaner air and reduced use of fossil fuels.”

Other writers pointed out how individuals who ride the bus are personally helping protect the environment. This could be seen as placing bus riders into the “hero” category. For example, Josh Fredman wrote (7/24/11): “Every ride I take means one less car on the streets, less pollution and more money in my pocket.” Jerry Wheeler responded to another letter’s complaint that wealthy people take the bus and are unnecessarily subsidized (8/2/11), “As far as people who own cars and choose to ride the bus, I say more power to them. They are helping to cut down on air pollution.”

In Stone’s typology of values, protecting the environment could fit in the Security category, as a need.

4.9 Values Conclusion

From examining the use of values in this debate, we can draw several conclusions relevant for other issues. First, we can see that debate participants, especially the “elites,” appealed to popular values that they thought would sway readers – primarily efficiency, the economy, and traffic. While we can’t measure how effective each value appeal was, we can discern that there are several parts to convincing audience members to support a policy action using values. First, the advocate must pick a value the target audience cares about. Second, the advocate must convince them that the policy action

(e.g. passing the transit fee) would help that value. And last, the advocate must decide how to respond to opponents' value appeals – primarily refuting their value claim or ignoring it. The top three values in this debate – efficiency, the economy, and traffic – are issues that everyone cares about, but are difficult to convince others will be helped by a particular policy. In particular, while everyone wants a strong economy and low employment, readers would have a difficult time deciding whether the fee would help or hurt the economy. Instead, most readers would respond to these arguments based on whether or not they are predisposed to favor public transit and how they feel about the government in general. On the other hand, how people feel about public transit can be unconsciously influenced over time by hearing repeated messages connecting transit to values like the economy or traffic.

Secondly, it's important to remember that people rank their values in order of importance. So, in addition to deciding whether a given policy helps a particular value, the audience member also must decide which of their values to base their position on. For example, while some King County residents may feel that it's important for issues to be voted on by the public, they may find that value less important than preserving equity. On the other hand, it's possible that many values one person holds align with each other – a person is more likely to believe that public votes on policy issues are important if they distrust government and emphasize government efficiency (or inefficiency).

Third, we can see how framing of the issue by highlighting particular values can be useful. By focusing relentlessly on government inefficiency, fee opponents made the debate about Metro's efficiency rather than about the value of public transit. By refusing to even engage in the other side's value appeals – traffic for example – opponents kept the focus on Metro. Fee supporters were not as successful in framing the debate and were frequently on the defensive. While we can't know for sure, it's possible that supporters could have been more effective by using more of their message to focus on the value of transit.

Fourth, looking at the values in this debate overall, we can see that it is primarily a debate about the role of government. A strong distrust of government and aversion to taxes was the driving force behind fee opponents, not public transit itself. The focus on efficiency was not because it is such a deep societal value but because people who don't like government can use it to criticize government and tax proposals. Wasteful and inefficient government is a popular meta-narrative in the United States and resonant with many audiences. The secondary values of voter participation and trust aligned with efficiency as part of a general anti-government message. Fee supporters spent their time defending government and making the case for the good it can do. The values of efficiency, economy, and traffic reduction were used to persuade others, but were not core beliefs by the participants.

And last, the appeals to equity and fairness, while playing a rather minor role in this debate, mirror larger discussions in society at large. The fundamental question of whether people should be treated the same or should be treated differently in order to bring about more equal opportunities is a major dividing line in our society. In this case, many car owners argued that it was unfair for government to treat them differently than bus riders – taxing them in order to subsidize others. Some transit supporters argued that society has a duty to support people who depend on the bus and ensure they have access to jobs and opportunity. Meanwhile, some car owners argued that they could not afford the fee and it was not equitable to tax them. It's difficult to tell whether the fairness or equity appeals are most resonant and effective, but we can see that they are popular.

CHAPTER 5: POLICY STORY ANALYSIS

Appealing to audience values is one key technique for winning an audience to one's side in a public policy debate. Values can be used within a broader framework of a Public Policy Story, described above as a narrative with three plot components and three character types. In this section I examine the six longer opinion articles in this case (three editorials and three Op-Eds) one at a time to test for the presence of these story elements. I am looking for the presence of a problem causing harm to people and values, a cause of the problem and person responsible, and a solution to fix the problem, brought about by a hero. I also analyze how strong or compelling each element is and look for overall patterns in the Public Policy Story on each side of the issue. After examining each of the six texts in detail, I will compare the primary policy stories. Through the lens of the Policy Story, I am exploring how the particular plot and character elements in each story may shape how the larger public thinks and talks about bus funding.

As a reminder, here is my framework for a Public Policy Story:

Model: Public Policy Story

Strategic narrative designed to persuade the audience to support a policy action

	<i>Plot Elements:</i>	<i>Characters:</i>
Now/ Imminent	<p>1.) Problem - Claim that a situation is harmful</p> <p>Purpose: Get audience to care; portray in a way to lead to preferred solution</p> <p>Strong story:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows impacts to audience values 	<p>Victim - People hurt by the problem</p> <p>Purpose: Get audience to care</p> <p>Strong story:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portrays victims in sympathetic light • Includes stories of personal experience • Expands victim group • Shows audience how they may be victims
Past/ Now	<p>2.) Cause - What led to the problem</p> <p>Purpose: Connect to preferred solution</p> <p>Strong story: Specific action that led to the problem; connects directly to the solution</p>	<p>Villain - Person or group responsible</p> <p>Purpose: Arouse indignation; demonstrate that human action caused the problem</p> <p>Strong story: Names the person or organization at fault, shows willful intention</p>
Future	<p>3.) Solution - Action that will solve the problem</p> <p>Purpose: Show how the problem can be fixed.</p> <p>Strong story: Specific action identified.</p>	<p>Hero(ine) - Person who can fix the problem</p> <p>Purpose: Put pressure on target, mobilize audience</p> <p>Strong story: Clearly states who has the power to fix the problem</p>

Figure 9

The opinion articles I analyzed for a Public Policy Story are listed below in Table 1.

Op-Eds and Editorials Analyzed for Public Policy Story

Date	Type	Title	Position
Thursday, 6/30/11	Editorial	“King County Metro needs overhaul, not a tax to cover past unsustainable decisions”	Anti-fee
Monday, 7/18/11	Op-Ed	“King County Council should enact \$20 vehicle fee now to save Metro bus service”	Pro-fee
Saturday, 7/23/11	Op-Ed	“County should approve vehicle fee to preserve Metro Transit service”	Pro-fee
Sunday, 7/24/11	Editorial	“Metro bus system should adjust without new revenue”	Anti-fee
Friday, 7/22/11	Op-Ed	“Raising King County’s car fee would prolong Metro’s inefficiency.”	Anti-fee
Wednesday, 7/27/11	Editorial	“No tax for transit without a public vote”	Anti-fee

Table 1

5.1 Editorial 6/30/11

This editorial was published eleven days after the first news article on the fee proposal. This piece is reactive – responding to the proposal and the policy story told by County Executive Dow Constantine and others.

Seattle Times Editorial, 6/30/11

“King County Metro needs overhaul, not a tax to cover past unsustainable decisions.”

The Seattle Times editorial board opposes the \$20 car-tab tax proposed in King County to raise money for King County Metro.

KING County Executive Dow Constantine proposes an annual \$20 car-tab tax to prevent cuts in bus service. The tax, another county official suggested, is only worth the price of five lattes and will last for two years.

We are not convinced.

Take the two years. It is argued that in two years the county can go to Olympia, or Washington, D.C., to get the money to offset the tax. Does anyone believe this?

The days of getting bailed out by a bigger government are coming to a close. Local governments have to get used to this. We all have to get used to it.

King County Metro Transit's deficit has several underlying causes. One is the economy, which is a problem we all have to live with — including the drivers who are expected to pay the tax.

Two problems are special to Metro. One is bus-driver pay. It can be defended by pointing to the 2010 contract, which has minimal raises. But under the previous contracts, between 2000 and 2009, bus-driver pay rose 38.5 percent, to the third-highest figure of any big-city bus operation in the country.

Metro now feels the consequences of the contracts it has signed.

Another problem is that Metro tried to serve the whole county. The agency is going back to setting routes based more on demand, and that is good. Run buses where people want to ride them. But it is too late to avoid this deficit.

Thus, a \$20-per-car tax.

Do the people support this tax? The mail we receive is running very much against it. We note that Constantine has stated he wants the tax to pass the Metropolitan King County Council by a supermajority so the people will not have a say about it on Nov. 8.

Constantine can point to Metro's problems right now and make a logical case for the new \$20 tax. In other times, this page would have agreed with him. Twenty dollars is, as a county official suggested, only five lattes. So it is.

The problem is that the five lattes are on top of all the other lattes, mochas and Frappuccinos people already buy for their government. Taxes go up in bad years because times are bad and good years because we can afford it.

There has to be a stopping point. Given the economic pain, the public opposition and the unbelievable claim that the \$20 tax is for two years only, this is a good time to say no.

Policy Story in 6/30 Editorial:

<p>Problem: Tax proposal</p> <p>Values harmed: economy, low taxes, voter participation</p>	<p>Victim: Taxpayers</p>
<p>Cause: Metro inefficiency and untrustworthy government</p> <p>Values violated: efficiency, trust</p>	<p>Villain: Metro, politicians (Secondary: bus drivers)</p>
<p>Solution: Stop the tax and reform Metro</p>	<p>Hero: Not clearly stated</p>

Table 2

There are three possible problems in this editorial: the tax proposal, Metro’s deficit, and government inefficiency. We can identify which problem is the focal point by looking at three things:

which problem is given the most attention, which problem includes a description of the values and people impacted, and which problem is connected to a cause. The tax is the focal point of the first several sentences of the article, as well as the last sentence. The people hurt by the tax are described in the fifth paragraph - the car owners who are suffering from the economic downturn and would be forced to pay the tax. By describing who is hurt by the tax, the editorial board lends more urgency to it as a problem.

An alternative is to view Metro's deficit as the primary problem in this text. However, the deficit is mentioned as a problem only in relation to the poor decisions that created it and the wrong solution of a tax; the impact of the deficit (bus cuts) is not discussed. As a problem description to get the audience's attention and show who will be hurt, the Metro deficit is much weaker than the problem of the tax proposal. There is very little reason to care about the deficit or the bus cuts except as a potential cause of a new tax. Last, Metro's inefficiency could be viewed as the primary problem portrayed in this text. Here again, there is no urgency to this problem or description of who will be hurt, except by linking it to the tax proposal.

The problem of the tax proposal is linked to Metro's deficit. The editorial gives three causes of the deficit: the economy, bus driver pay, and inefficient bus routes. The poor economy is described as a "problem we all have to live with" and there is no person or villain associated with this cause; this makes indignation about this cause less likely. Bus driver pay is a problem that's "special" to Metro; the pay is described as having risen quickly and is now one of the highest in the country. The party responsible for the too-high pay is Metro: "Metro now feels the consequences of the contracts it has signed." The third cause is Metro "tried to serve the whole county" with bus service. Metro is addressing this cause now, but it's too late to avoid the consequences. There is no villain described as causing the recession, but the villain at fault for too-high bus driver pay and inefficient routes is Metro.

Describing the reasons for Metro's deficit doesn't address the reason politicians proposed a tax rather than addressing Metro's efficiency. The editorial addresses that part of the cause in the second-to-last paragraph: politicians just like taxes. "Taxes go up in bad years because times are bad and good years because we can afford it." The editorial portrays public officials are too willing to turn to taxes to solve deficits when instead they should be making hard choices about efficiency.

There are several possibilities for the villain in this text. The authors pin some blame on Metro, for signing bad contracts and trying to serve the whole county. However, the harshest treatment in the text is for a nameless, faceless "government", which is the recipient of lattes and Frappuccinos paid for by taxpayers. The authors criticize nameless persons twice in the text. First, a "county official" suggests the tax is worth the price of five lattes, which the authors scorn. Later, the authors state "it is argued" the county can go to Olympia or DC to get money, but "does anyone believe this?" The text does not state who has made that argument. County Executive Dow Constantine oversees Metro and has proposed the tax, yet the authors do not portray him as the villain in this text. The editorial board slams "the government", but does not call out any of the villains by name. It may be that the editorial board had political reasons for not criticizing specific individuals more directly; perhaps they did not want to make enemies or alarm readers who may like the County Executive. Another possibility is that, in contrast to Gamson's theory that a specific villainous target is needed for indignation, a general target of "the government" or "politicians" may more easily raise people's ire. Once you name and blame a specific politician, that person can prove you wrong or show another side of him or herself. But "politicians" or "the government" can't do that.

The solution to the tax proposal is simple: stop the tax. ("Say no" as the editorial concludes.) A hero is not identified. The solution to Metro's deficit (a secondary problem) is linked to the causes: Metro should lower bus driver pay and restructure service to become more efficient. No solution to the cause of the bad economy is put forth. No "hero" is explicitly mentioned who should do these things;

we can assume Metro is the entity needed to reform itself, which could turn it from villain to hero.

Another interpretation is that the editorial board itself is the hero, by bringing up the real causes of the deficit, protecting taxpayers, and putting pressure on Metro to reform.

Of the three possible interpretations of the problem (the tax proposal, Metro's deficit, and government inefficiency), the tax is given much more urgency as something people should be concerned about. Its victims and consequences are identified; whereas the victims and consequences of the Metro deficit are invisible. The claim of Metro's inefficiency, while given much attention in the text, is not the key problem in the policy story. The inefficiency comes up only because of the tax proposal; it does not have its own urgency. Its victims are only described in the context of the tax proposal (taxpayers as victims). Further, there is not a strong causal story for the inefficiency.

The editorial could have been written differently. If the impacts and victims of the Metro deficit and bus cuts had been described, the primary problem would have been the cuts. The authors still could have pushed their solution and cause – the inefficiency of Metro and “reforms” to cut costs – these could be described as the way to stop bus cuts. Differing sides in a policy debate may sometimes agree on what the primary problem is, but disagree on the cause and solution. If the deficit is caused by the economy, then a tax is the solution. If it's caused by inefficiency, reform is the solution. Another possibility is that the authors did see the bus cuts as a problem, but saw a “solution” of a new tax as far worse (the cure is worse than the disease). If the proposed solution is really bad, then perhaps the problem is not so bad.

It's important to examine how the characters in the story or represented, and who is active, passive, or missing. County Executive Dow Constantine is an active figure, as the originator of the tax proposal. The editorial board is present in the text, as the “we” who are not convinced the tax will last only two years. Metro took action, signing contracts with bus drivers and trying to serve the whole county. “The people” have sent mail to the Times in opposition. Car owners are present as payers of

the fee; they are not depicted as choosing action, but as victims. Bus drivers are present as recipients of a generous contract; they are not depicted as choosing action, but as passive beneficiaries of Metro's decisions on labor contracts. Bus riders are not present in the editorial. As a whole, the passive vs active construction of characters in the editorial points to only official bodies as having power in this situation, while individuals are acted upon; this could be considered the opposite of a mobilizing text which can demonstrate how people can make a difference. In fact, by showing government as powerful and the people as not, it could provoke further cynicism about civic involvement among the public.

The character of "the government" is amplified in the text as almost a faceless person at one point, or at least having the properties of a human. In the fifth paragraph, taxpayers are described as being forced to buy lattes, mochas, and Frappuccinos for "their government." This compares government services to luxury items – a Frappuccino is not a necessity in the way a loaf of bread might be. By using a comparison of buying goods for an entity, the statement also shapes how people might look at government services. Rather than viewing taxes as providing public services such as libraries and schools that benefit everyone, the authors view taxes as buying a luxury product for government. Since a government is not a person and cannot ingest a Frappuccino, it may be that the statement is meant to bring to mind lazy government workers, who are being bought these treats by taxpayers.

Lastly, the editorial responds to the policy story told by fee supporters in the previous two news articles published before the editorial. For fee supporters, the problem is bus cuts, the cause is the recession, and the solution is the fee. This editorial does not dispute the problem of bus cuts; in fact bus cuts are not mentioned in the text except as the reason Constantine proposed the tax. The cause of the recession is rebutted; the editorial states that a more important (and actionable) cause is Metro's poor management. The editorial responds primarily to proponents' argument that a fee is needed.

The values appealed to in this editorial are efficiency, voter participation, the economy, low taxes, and trust. Efficiency and trust are used in the "cause" part of the policy story – it's Metro's

inefficiency and the untrustworthiness of public officials that brought about the tax proposal; these villains have violated these values. The values of the economy and low taxes are used in the problem part of the story – these are goals that would be hurt by the tax. Voter participation is a value hurt by the proposal to have the County Council enact the fee rather than putting the measure to a public vote. All of these values are appealed to in reverse – showing how the transit fee proposal would violate these values. The editorial is a response to a proposal and policy story from fee proponents.

In summary, I find that this editorial fits the framework of a Public Policy Story. The focus of this story is the cause and villain (government inefficiency and untrustworthy politicians), which bring up resonant values with the audience. By not mentioning the problem from the opposing side's story (bus cuts and their impact), this story keeps the focus on inefficiency. This is likely a persuasive text to readers who distrust the government and trust the Seattle Times. It's possible that even audience members who are less receptive to the government inefficiency story begin to unconsciously distrust Metro and its bus drivers after reading this text.

5.2 Op-Ed 7/18/11

This Op-Ed by three business leaders was published about two weeks after the editorial opposing the fee and one week before the County Council was scheduled to vote on the CRC.

Seattle Times Op-Ed, 7/18/11

King County Council should enact \$20 vehicle fee now to save Metro bus service

Three business leaders urge the King County Council to impose a \$20 vehicle fee to preserve Metro bus service. They argue the fee is necessary to keep bus service accessible and affordable and avoid expected congestion if service is cut.

By Maud Daudon, Scott Armstrong and Greg Johnson

Special to The Times

THE King County Council has the power to keep the economy from sliding backward, keep commuters moving to their jobs and keep traffic congestion in check by preserving Metro bus service from drastic cuts.

The need is clear. Every day, close to one out of every 10 people in King County takes the bus. More than half of those trips are to work or school — including 40 percent of all work trips to downtown Seattle — and 1,400 businesses buy passes for their employees.

A sharp recession-driven decline in the sales-tax revenues that support Metro Transit means a \$60 million annual shortfall. Without new funding, the public would lose 9 million passenger trips per year.

Four out of five Metro riders will have to walk farther, wait longer, make an extra transfer, stand in the aisle, or stand on the curb and see fully loaded buses pass them by. Meanwhile, around 15,000 cars will be put back on the streets every day.

Given these significant impacts, King County's was the only bus system to be granted help by the state Legislature this year — with authority to enact a temporary, two-year, \$20 vehicle fee, dubbed by lawmakers a Congestion Reduction Charge.

We applaud the four members of the County Council who have pledged support for this fee: Larry Phillips, Bob Ferguson, Larry Gossett and Joe McDermott. Other regional leaders including the Kirkland City Council and 18 members of the Regional Transit Task Force have also shown their support.

Now we need other County Council members to join these leaders.

Good efforts have minimized the amount needed to keep our bus system working. The council already launched the audit that led to Metro cutting staff by 100 positions, raising fares for riders by 80 percent over the past four years, and canceling bus purchases and postponing service expansion. Metro drivers agreed to a new contract that saves \$17 million in costs every year. In all, the savings and efficiencies have totaled \$400 million over the past several years.

As far as pushing this to a public vote, the two-year Band-Aid for Metro is a short-term, critical bridge to 2013, not a long-term commitment. An election now will waste up to \$1 million in transit dollars that more profitably fund bus service.

We need to focus our election resources and energy on the next two years, when the governor's Connect Washington task force is expected to recommend a comprehensive statewide transportation package to put before voters to fix our crumbling roads and reduce the reliance of transit agencies across the state on the unreliable sales tax.

We urge the remaining members of the King County Council to exercise their role as leaders and act now to keep our transit system moving. We do not want to experience the impacts that pushing people off buses and into their cars will have on all commuters.

We want riders to be able to get to their jobs or to school affordably.

We want low-income people who already spend a large part of their income on transportation to conserve their remaining resources for other critical family needs.

We do not need a major blow to our transportation system that could delay or derail our much-needed economic recovery.

Once County Council members look at the facts, we believe they will understand that they can best serve their constituents by exercising their authority to enact the temporary fee and preserve essential services for the public.

Maud Daudon is chair of the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce, and president & CEO of Seattle-Northwest Securities Corporation. Scott Armstrong is president and CEO of Group Health Cooperative. Greg Johnson is chair of the Bellevue Downtown Association and president of Wright Runstad & Company.

Policy Story in 7/18 Op-Ed:

Problem: Bus cuts Values harmed: economy, traffic, equity	Victim: Bus riders, car drivers, low-income bus riders
Cause: The Recession	Villain: [None]
Solution: Transit fee Values preserved: jobs, school, equity, leadership, traffic	Hero: [County Council] Values: leadership

Table 3

The problem in this Op-Ed is the “drastic cuts” in bus service mentioned in the first paragraph. The first sentence lists the consequences of the cuts, including harm to the economy, difficulty for commuters getting to work, and worse traffic congestion. The problem is described with a high level of severity. Phrases like “drastic cuts,” “pushing people off buses,” and “major blow to our transportation system” highlight the drama. The combination of the severity and the suddenness of the cuts paints a picture of a crisis.

Bus riders are the primary group of people portrayed as affected by the problem. They are first described as numerous: “Every day, close to one out of every 10 people in King County takes the bus.” Making bus riders look common may convince readers who don’t ride the bus that a lot of people are affected. The sentence “Four out of five Metro riders will have to walk farther...” describes the negative consequences for riders. Work or school is listed as the destination of most bus trips; these are noble travel purposes that might create sympathy or concern for the public interest. Car drivers are also victims of the bus cuts, impacted by additional traffic congestion, but they are not described as directly or completely as bus riders. Rather than describing the people who commute by car, the authors

instead use the nouns “traffic” and “cars.” This includes the phrase “keep traffic congestion in check” in the first paragraph and “around 15,000 cars will be put back on the streets every day” in paragraph four. The latter phrase uses passive construction: who is putting these cars back on the streets? Another way of stating the same thing would be “Around 15,000 bus riders are expected to switch to driving every day, adding more cars to the streets.” Does the difference matter? The alternative language constructs bus riders as active participants who makes choices about how to get around, whereas in the first construction, bus riders don’t exist. This could impact how bus riders see themselves and how others see bus riders. On the other hand, perhaps the alternate language would set up bus riders as enemies of car drivers, competing for road space. Car commuters are mentioned in paragraph eleven, which states “We do not want to experience the impacts that pushing people off buses and into their cars will have on all commuters.” In this sentence “all commuters” are victims of the traffic congestion, although who the “we” is, is not clear.

Lastly, low-income people are impacted. “We want low-income people who already spend a large part of their income on transportation to conserve their remaining resources for other critical family needs.” This language paints low-income people as conscientious, deserving of help, and providing for their families. They are not described as having an active role in fixing the problem – they are passive victims. One group missing from this text, but prominent in other texts, is car owners who would pay the \$20 fee.

The cause of the problem is identified in the third paragraph as the recession: “A sharp recession-driven decline in the sales-tax revenues that support Metro Transit means a \$60 million annual shortfall.” The cause is not described in depth; perhaps because at the time this was published (2011) falling tax revenues were a common news story. Nevertheless, the authors could have explained what proportion of Metro’s revenue came from sales tax, the amount of the revenue decline, and how this compares to other transit agencies. Furthermore, the text does not mention that Metro became

dependent on sales tax revenue because of Initiative 695, which ended Metro's previous source of funding, the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax. A more robust explanation of the cause might add credibility to the solution – when people believe a specific action or policy is the cause, they are more apt to support the matching solution. A stronger cause might also head off the opposition's causal story, that it's Metro inefficiency that caused the deficit.

A convincing statement of the cause also helps convince the audience that the solution will prevent the problem from occurring again. If the recession caused the problem, proponents need to state how this solution will prevent the same thing from happening in the next recession, such as a revenue source less volatile. Further, proponents need to be able to explain why the problem still exists after the recession has ended. The lack of a more robust description of the cause may lead to a credibility gap among the audience – if people don't really understand why the problem happened, they may be more reluctant to reach into their pockets to fix it.

This policy story lacks a villain. No person or organization is listed as responsible for the deficit and proposed cuts; instead an abstract force, the recession, is the cause. In an alternate way of constructing the story, the authors could have named anti-tax activist Tim Eyman as the cause of the problem, for spearheading a successful campaign to remove the previous funding source for Metro. In other texts, the fee opponents identified Metro as the cause of the shortfall, for being inefficient and paying drivers too much. Metro as the villain or Tim Eyman as the villain would both be a more concrete target for responsibility to fix the problem. Instead, in this text the problem was not created by any person or group, but an immovable force called "the recession." From social movement theory, a weak causal story lessens the "fire in the belly" response, which could have been generated by portraying a willful actor responsible for hurting people.

The solution to prevent looming bus cuts is the fee, as listed in the headline. In the fifth paragraph, King County is described as the only bus system granted help by the legislature - the

authority to levy the fee. The sixth paragraph mentions all of the people who support the fee. While the fee is the solution, it is only temporary, not long-term. It's described in the ninth paragraph as a "two-year Band-Aid" and a "short-term, critical bridge to 2013, not a long-term commitment." The long-term solution is hinted at in the tenth paragraph: "a comprehensive statewide transportation package" to fix roads and "reduce the reliance of transit agencies across the state on the unreliable sales tax." The importance of a long-term solution to prevent future bus cuts is not stated.

The County Council could become the hero of this story, if it enacts the fee and comes to the rescue of bus riders and traffic-weary drivers. The first paragraph describes the County Council as "having the power" to prevent bad things from happening. Four members of the Council are applauded for pledging support for the fee. The other County Council members need to "join these leaders." The Council has already taken action, by launching an audit that found efficiencies at Metro. The authors call on the remaining members of the Council to "exercise their role as leaders and act now to keep our transit system moving." The last sentence of the text wraps up with the actions the Council should take to solve the problem, helping both their constituents and the public: "they can best serve their constituents by exercising their authority to enact the temporary fee and preserve essential services for the public." Neither the public nor any of the people impacted by the bus cuts are described as the potential solver of the problem.

The social actors in this text who have taken action or have the power to take action are government entities: primarily the County Council, but also the state legislature and the governor's task force. The headline starts this pattern with "King County Council should enact..." The first sentence continues it with "The King County Council has the power..." The Council took action in the past: "The council already launched the audit." The King County Council is clearly portrayed as powerful and able to affect the problem. In addition, the state legislature gave the County authority, and the Governor's task force is expected to make recommendations. The only other entity or group being portrayed as

having taken or able to take action is bus drivers, “Metro drivers agreed to a new contract...” Bus riders, car drivers, and the public are not portrayed as making choices or taking actions.

Groups that are portrayed as being acted upon include bus riders, car drivers, and low-income people. “Four out of five Metro riders will have to walk farther, wait longer, make an extra transfer, stand in the aisle, or stand on the curb and see fully loaded buses pass them by.” This sentence makes bus riders look like victims who are not in control of their own fate. Further, riders are metaphorically “pushed”: “pushing people off buses and into their cars...” The most prominent group missing in this text is car owners who will pay the fee.

Agency is obscured in the public vote sentence, “As far as pushing this to a public vote...” It’s not explained who is doing the pushing. In the Seattle Times June 30th editorial, it is clear that the editorial board is one group that would prefer a public vote on the fee. This text does not name the editorial board; this may be a strategic decision to avoid making enemies. But it makes the text less powerful and makes the issue less understandable to the general public who may not be following the issue and may not know who is calling for a public vote.

In addition to stating its own policy story, the Op-Ed contains responses to the claims of fee opponents such as the Seattle Times editorial board. The first seven paragraphs focus on the core policy story: bus cuts are a big problem caused by the recession and the fee will prevent them. Not until the eighth paragraph is Metro’s efficiency brought up, and then charges by opponents are not stated directly. By not giving much attention to the opponents’ frame of efficiency, the authors focus attention on the impacts of bus cuts.

In this story, audience values are appealed to primarily in the problem and solution sections of the text. Values of a strong economy, equity, and free-flowing traffic will be harmed by bus cuts. But if the transit fee is enacted and cuts are prevented, these values will be protected. In addition, action by the County Council to enact the fee (rather than a public vote) would demonstrate the value of

leadership. Value appeals are not present in the cause and villain section of the story, which is incomplete and weak.

This text shows us an example of policy story with a strong, dramatic portrayal of a problem, including the impact on values and people. This may be enough to get the audience to care about the issue, but a stronger cause and villain, connected to a solution, would help convince the audience that the fee is the correct solution. The story successfully puts pressure on the potential hero of the County Council – by focusing on their ability to solve the problem. However, by making bus riders and other victims passive characters in the story, it reduces the likelihood of their involvement in the issue.

5.3 Op-Ed, 7/22/11

This Op-Ed by Michael Ennis of the Washington Policy Center was published five days after the Op-Ed by business leaders and three days before the scheduled vote on the fee.

Raising King County's car fee would prolong Metro's inefficiency

Seattle Times

Friday, July 22, 2011

The Metropolitan King County Council considers imposing a \$20-per-vehicle fee, and many supporters say it will prevent Metro bus-service cuts. But guest columnist Michael Ennis notes that many of the cuts are a task force's recommendations to improve efficiency and should be made.

By Michael Ennis
Special to The Times

FOR months now, transit advocates have been whipped into a frenzy trying to convince anyone who will listen that the Metropolitan King County Council must increase car tabs by \$20 for the next two years to avoid 600,000 hours of bus-service cuts.

From higher traffic congestion and environmental damage to regional job loss and a deeper recession, the transit lobby is in high gear to convince King County Council members to hike car tabs without a public vote, where they fear, probably correctly, that such a provision would fail.

These groups loudly point to a long list of routes that Metro officials say would be affected, either through restructuring or elimination.

But what they deliberately do not say is that most of the proposed service changes are a result of recommendations from the King County Regional Transit Task Force (RTTF) and Metro's new Strategic Plan,

both of which call for new service guidelines that restructure and eliminate low-demand bus routes to improve efficiency.

In fact, this new framework has been lauded by many officials and it even prompted King County Councilmember Larry Phillips to proudly declare, "The era of empty buses is over."

Metro officials use three broad categories to show where the proposed service cuts would take place: low-productivity routes (220,000 hours, 37 percent), restructuring inefficient or redundant routes (256,000 hours, 43 percent) and reducing higher-productivity routes (124,000 hours, 21 percent).

In other words, 476,000 hours or about 80 percent of the proposed service cuts are attributed to making Metro's bus service more efficient, as both the Regional Transit Task Force and Metro's own Strategic Plan recommend.

Obviously, if the car-tab increase does not occur, Metro officials will presumably move forward with the service reductions they have strongly warned the public about. But this would not be a bad thing, despite what the transit lobby would have everyone believe.

According to Metro officials, these service reductions are a result of "duplicative routes, routes that operate on over-served corridors, routes that operate on appropriately-served corridors, corridors that are over-served, mismatches between service and ridership, or major development/land use changes."

About 124,000 service hours of the proposed cuts are from routes that Metro officials consider being "above low productivity." While this segment of cuts may not be desirable, it only represents about 3.5 percent of total bus service.

Also consider that passenger demand on Metro's buses has fallen significantly over the last two years and is near 2007 levels, yet costs have continued to increase over the same time period. In fact, the task force found that Metro has some of the highest operating expenses of comparable bus agencies in the country.

Voters have already given Metro two recent tax increases in 2000 and 2006. Officials also promised that a third tax increase in 2008, expanding Sound Transit, would help Metro save money by eliminating redundant service. Despite these tax increases, Metro has only delivered about a third of the 1.2 million hours of new service promised to voters.

When times are good, officials want more money. And now when times are bad, officials still want more money.

When will it ever be enough?

The current message from the public is clear: Government officials at all levels should live within their means. This includes King County Metro.

Instead of raising taxes, again, to support an inefficient program that has failed to deliver from the first two tax increases, Metro officials should implement the RTTF recommendations and preserve long-term sustainability.

Michael Ennis is the transportation director at Washington Policy Center, an independent policy-research organization in Washington state.

Policy Story in 7/22 Op-Ed:

Problem: Tax Values harmed: low taxes, representing constituents	Victim: Taxpayers
Cause: Inefficient Metro and untrustworthy politicians Values violated: efficiency, trust	Villain: Metro, transit lobby
Solution: Stop the tax and reform Metro Values: efficiency, trust, low taxes	Hero: [Washington Policy Center, Voters]

Table 3

Similar to the Seattle Times editorial, the problem is the fee proposal and the victims are the taxpayers. The harm caused to taxpayers is not described in depth; perhaps it is assumed that people do not need to be convinced that taxes are bad. One character group that is invisible is bus riders; the riders on the “inefficient” routes are not included in the story. Another group missing is car owners; they are not described as victims of an unfair tax that benefits others, in contrast to some letters to the editor.

The cause of the fee proposal is Metro’s inefficient service, along with the greediness of public officials. Paragraphs 13-14 state that public officials cannot be trusted regarding taxes. The text also attempts to poke holes into the reasons officials give for taxes, for example asking why they want money both in good times and bad times. The reason for Metro’s inefficient route structure, which is part of the cause of the deficit and thus the tax proposal, is not described.

Both Metro and the “transit lobby” are the villains of the story, the cause of the fee proposal and inefficiency. The first several paragraphs of the story talk disparagingly about transit advocates, who have been “whipped into a frenzy”, “loudly point to a long list of routes” and “deliberately” do not provide other information. The motivation for the “transit lobby” to act in this way is not explained, leaving a hole that may ring untrue to all readers.

The solution in this story is: 1) Don’t pass the fee; and 2) Cut low-ridership bus routes. This is stated in the final paragraph. The hero of the story could be interpreted as the author and the

Washington Policy Center, who are attempting to rescue the victim taxpayers from the villain Metro by explaining the falsity of the transit lobby's story. Or perhaps voters are the hero (and victim) who, despite giving Metro past tax increases, will prevent this increase.

Metro's efficiency (or lack thereof) is the primary subject of the Op-Ed, specifically focused on Metro's allocation of bus service and routes with lower ridership. Other subjects mentioned is Metro's history with tax increases and expanding bus service, and the size of government in general. The subject of the impact of bus cuts is mentioned, in a very different way than by fee proponents. The public vote is not mentioned at all, nor are the wages of Metro employees. Benefits of transit are not mentioned (either in support or to argue against).

This text turns the story of fee supporters on its head, by claiming that bus cuts are not a problem at all but in fact a needed action that has been promoted by Metro itself. Unlike the earlier Seattle Times editorial, which simply ignores the issue of bus cuts and whether they are a problem causing harm to people and values, this text argues the cuts are a good thing. If successful the text is successful in convincing readers, this text demolishes the Bus Cuts policy story, by removing the most dramatic and resonant part, the problem. In other ways, this story is very similar to the earlier Times editorial, focusing on Metro inefficiency and untrustworthy public officials as the focal point of the story, the cause of the problem, and the villain to direct anger at. Using the meta-narrative of bad government is likely resonant with large portions of the audience and a smart strategy.

5.4 Op-Ed 7/23/11

This Op-Ed, by the president of the transit union, was published about three weeks after the Seattle Times editorial opposing the fee, which blamed high driver wages as part of the reason for

Metro's deficit. The article comes five days after the business leaders' Op-Ed, one day after the Ennis Op-Ed, and three days before the Council was scheduled to vote on the fee.

Seattle Times Op-Ed, 7/23/11

County should approve vehicle fee to preserve Metro Transit service

The Metropolitan King County Council should approve a two-year per-vehicle fee of \$20 per year to stave off more cuts to Metro Transit, writes guest columnist Paul J. Bachtel, president of the Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 587.

By Paul J. Bachtel

Special to The Times

METRO Transit faces a budget shortfall of \$120 million and 600,000 hours of service cuts over the next two years, due to a prolonged decline in sales-tax revenue. On Monday, the Metropolitan King County Council should approve a Congestion Reduction Charge that would save most of Metro's existing service for two years. The two-year car-tab fee would charge \$20 per vehicle each year.

Although this does not provide long-term funding, it allows time to seek a more stable revenue source for transit. If six of the nine council members vote yes, the fee will be enacted automatically for two years. Or the council could vote to send the car-tab fee to the fall or winter ballot.

The Seattle Times has urged a "no" vote, blaming Metro for having made "unsustainable decisions" ["Drawing the line on Metro car-tab tax," editorial, Opinion, June 30].

The Amalgamated Transit Union Local 587, representing Metro vehicle operators and mechanics, disagrees. Metro has pared its budget repeatedly over successive years and is down to only two weeks of operating reserves. Metro employees have already forestalled service reductions by accepting furlough days, cuts to benefits and cost-of-living adjustments. Bus drivers work nights, weekends, and split shifts spread over 10, 12, even 16 hours, without overtime. Drivers are even sacrificing lunch and bathroom breaks!

The Times asks why car drivers should pay. Each weekday, more than 360,000 people ride Metro. On average, each bus in the afternoon peak carries 39 passengers. Imagine 39 more cars on the road per bus. Now multiply those extra cars by the thousands of hours of impending service cuts. It will seem like there is a sports game or bridge closure every day.

Car drivers face an unfortunate choice: pay \$20 once a year, or sit in traffic longer each day. Saving \$20 a year would be pound-foolish. According to the Texas Transportation Institute Traffic Mobility Report, in 2009, the area's peak auto commuters wasted an average of 35 gallons of gas and 44 hours due to congestion.

Congestion is a substantial drag on the economy. Using the outdated fuel cost of \$2.73 per gallon, the Mobility Report calculated that the area's truck congestion alone cost \$659 million in 2009 — equivalent to 1,500 family jobs. Instead, this is money down the drain for businesses, whether they depend on freight to and from the port, or deliveries between suburbs.

The Times suggests lower cost-of-living adjustments for bus drivers, something the drivers have already accepted. But this does not come close to solving Metro's problem. The average bus-driver wage is about

\$50,000 (\$49,520 in 2009). Metro's 2,800 drivers would each have to accept wage cuts of more than \$20,000 per year, or 40 percent of their average wage, to plug the \$60 million budget gap.

We all know elderly, youth, students, low-income and disabled friends and neighbors who need the bus, and none of us wants service cut. The people who serve us at the mall, in restaurants, at the movies, clean our offices, and cook and clean for us in hospitals and nursing homes may not make enough money to own cars and pay for car insurance. If late-night service is cut, how many will either drive without insurance or lose their jobs?

The public wants to solve these problems. For \$20 per year on our car tabs, we can keep Metro service going with only minor service cuts for the next two years, and avoid increasing traffic and stranding those who have no other transportation. The Congestion Reduction Fee is well worth the investment.

Paul J. Bachtel is president and business agent of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 587.

Policy Story in 7/23 Op-Ed:

Problem: Bus Cuts Values harmed: reducing traffic, the economy, equity	Victim: Car drivers, people who depend on transit
Cause: Recession	Villain: [None]
Solution: Fee Values preserved: economy, helping others, reducing traffic	Hero: The public

Table 4

In the text, the first paragraph hits the three plot components: the problem is the bus cuts caused by Metro’s budget shortfall, the cause is the decline in sales tax revenue, and the solution is the Congestion Reduction Charge. However, this paragraph doesn’t encapsulate the reasons people should care about the problem, including who is hurt by the cuts and what values are impacted. We have to make it down to the fifth paragraph to learn why we should care about bus cuts. Bachtel gives two reasons to care: 1.) traffic congestion, which hurts the economy and wastes car drivers’ time and money; and 2.) harm to the “elderly, youth, students, low-income and disabled friends and neighbors who need the bus.”

The harm caused by traffic congestion and “stranding” transit-dependent people could be interpreted as part of a “public good” value. The people who depend on the bus are people who “serve

us at the mall, in restaurants, at the movies, clean our offices, and cook and clean for us in hospitals and nursing homes.” Preventing bus cuts is not only about helping one category of people (bus riders), but also helps anyone who dislikes traffic congestion or depends on a low-wage worker. This adds up to pretty much everyone. The general message could be interpreted as: “We are all in this together and are all affected when people can’t get around.”

The last paragraph of the article wraps up the story with a clear hero: “The public wants to solve these problems.” By paying the fee, the public can prevent the harm of “increasing traffic and stranding those who have no other transportation.” The last paragraph has perhaps the most compelling story in the article: why we should care about the problem, who is hurt, and how the hurt can be prevented. Bachtel’s policy story is interwoven with a response to the June 30th Times editorial and the assertion that Metro pays bus drivers too much. He paints an alternate story of the bus drivers as both victims and heroes of Metro’s deficit. The suffering bus drivers have taken furloughs, benefit cuts, and lost lunch breaks; but through their action, they prevented earlier cuts, thus making them the heroes. From paragraph 4:

“Metro employees have already forestalled service reductions by accepting furlough days, cuts to benefits and cost-of-living adjustments. Bus drivers work nights, weekends, and split shifts spread over 10, 12, even 16 hours, without overtime. Drivers are even sacrificing lunch and bathroom breaks.”

In this text Bachtel paints a complete Public Policy Story encompassing values of reducing congestion and helping others, while also combatting his opponents’ story of Metro Inefficiency. His story is the first that makes bus drivers a hero of the story and tells their side of things, a significant development in the debate. By spending most of his time combatting the Inefficiency story, he keeps the focus on that subject or frame, while drawing only minimal attention to the values of investing in transit – to help others, community, and traffic.

5.5 Editorial 7/24/11

This article is the second Seattle Times editorial opposing the fee and was published one day before the County Council was scheduled to vote on the Congestion Reduction Charge.

Seattle Times Editorial, 7/24/11

"Metro bus system should adjust without new revenue."

The Seattle Times editorial board argues against King County Metro's proposed \$20 addition to the car-tab tax.

THE proposal by King County Executive Dow Constantine for a \$20 car-tab tax to bolster Metro bus service puts the public over a barrel. It needs bus service. The average car owner can afford \$20 more. Yet giving the county one more tax increase would allow it not to do what it ought to do, which is to adapt to the new, slower-growing economy.

Consider labor negotiations. A year ago, the top wage rate for a bus driver was \$28.47, up 37 percent in the past decade, 10 percent faster than inflation. Drivers' wages were the third-highest in the country, slightly higher than drivers' wages in New York City.

It was the Amalgamated Transit Union's job to get a good deal for its members, and it did. The fault lies with leaders who agreed to the contracts.

A year ago they stiffened up a bit. The union gave up a cost-of-living adjustment for 2011, which was laudable, and more than the sheriff's deputies did; and it gave up a guarantee that its adjustment would be at least 3 percent.

But the drivers kept cost-of-living adjustments for 2012 and 2013, and all the wage gains it had won in the previous 10 years. It also won an increase of 1.3 percent in 2012.

The concessions were not enough.

More important is the matter of service.

Metro says that without the new \$20 tax it will have to cut service by 17 percent. Much of that it should do anyway. As Michael Ennis of the Washington Policy Center said on this page last week, a Metro document outlining 600,000 hours in cuts listed 80 percent of the hours as low-productivity routes, meaning they didn't have enough riders or needed to be restructured to be more efficient.

An official 27-member task force, which reported late last year, recommended that Metro management "must control all of the agency's operating expenses to provide a cost structure that is sustainable over time."

We agree. Since 2000, Metro has been given an additional three-tenths of a cent on the sales tax, to say nothing of its fare increases. Part of "sustainable" means not continually asking for more money.

Policy Story in 7/24 Editorial:

Problem: Fee proposal	Victim: The public
Cause: Metro inefficiency Values violated: efficiency, trust	Villain: Metro
Solution: Reform Metro	Hero: [Voters]

Table 5

The problem is the tax proposal. The victim could be seen as “the public,” which is described in the first sentence as being put “over a barrel” by Constantine’s tax proposal because “it” needs bus service, but a tax would not force Metro to become more efficient. The description likens the situation to blackmail: accept this tax or we cut bus service, but we won’t do what’s really needed and become more efficient (by cutting wages and routes). However the editorial goes on to say that the bus cuts should be done regardless of the shortfall, because the routes are inefficient. The bus riders who might ride these inefficient routes are not mentioned.

From the first sentence, we might assume that County Executive Dow Constantine is the villain; his proposal for the tax “puts the public over a barrel.” In the third paragraph, we learn that the fault of the too-generous contract with the bus drivers is “leaders who agreed to the contracts,” who are not specified or called out by name (similar to previous editorials). Like the other anti-fee texts, the solution to the inefficiency and tax proposal is to cut wages and cut inefficient bus routes. As the headline says, Metro must “adjust.” The second to last paragraph quotes a task force that recommended Metro management control all operating expenses.

Like the other anti-fee texts, bus riders are not present in this text. Taxpayers are there, but only in the background, not described. The primary character in the text is Metro, and also bus drivers. The first paragraph includes the public, as a victim who “needs bus service.” The “average” car owner is present in the first paragraph, as able to afford the \$20 fee. Paragraphs two through five cover bus

drivers, their union, and Metro labor negotiators. The wages for drivers is listed in paragraph two. The transit union is mentioned in paragraph three, as, perhaps caustically, doing a good job for its members. In paragraph four, the union “gave up” a cost of living adjustment for its members, which was “laudable.”

This text has the same basic Policy Story as the earlier Seattle Times editorial, with one twist: following the lead of the Michael Ennis Op-Ed, the story now contradicts the problem part of the Bus Cuts story and states that the cuts are actually a good thing.

5.6 Editorial 7/27/11

This editorial was published two days after the County Council postponed a vote on the fee until August, with the expectation of a supermajority vote in favor of the fee.

No tax for transit without a public vote

Seattle Times, The (WA) - Wednesday, July 27, 2011

THE new normal: an economy that does not bounce back. Big institutions, including King County Metro, have not accepted this reality and internalized what it means. The \$20 car-tabs proposal is proof of it.

For some people in today's economy, paying another \$20 is difficult and painful. Others could afford the \$20, but ask: When does government have enough?

Metro raised its tax rate twice in the past 11 years and has raised fares several times. With the tax increases came promises of extra service. In each case the service was less than promised, and more of the money went into labor contracts. Now the promise is to limit the \$20 tax to two years. And then what?

Two years ago, people never would have believed that statewide unemployment would be at 9.2 percent today. But it is. We do not know when commerce, investment and jobs will fully recover.

This is not an economy in which public institutions can be given carte blanche to solve their problems by raising taxes. The private sector has had to adjust. The public sector has to live in the same world.

This is not the opinion of only The Seattle Times editorial board. We hear this from the public all the time.

The politicians know what the public thinks. On Monday, the Democratic majority on the supposedly nonpartisan Metropolitan King County Council delayed a decision on the \$20 tax. They had the votes for a tax, but it would have had to go on the ballot. They did not have the extra votes to impose the tax themselves.

The transit lobby lobbied hard not to let the public vote on the \$20 tax. So the County Council postponed its decision until Aug. 15.

Thank council members Reagan Dunn, Kathy Lambert, Jane Hague and Pete von Reichbauer for opposing a council-only decision on the \$20 and pushing for a solution that includes sustainable reforms at Metro. We hope they stand firm against any proposal to impose a tax without a public vote.

Policy Story in 7/27 Editorial:

Problem: Fee Values harmed: Economy, voter participation, trust	Victim: The public, people who can't afford the fee
Cause: Government arrogance Values violated: Trust	Villain: Metro/ politicians/ transit lobby
Solution: Public vote	Hero: Voters, County Councilmembers Dunn, Lambert, Hague, Reichbauer

Table 6

This editorial could be viewed as its own policy story or as a response to the policy story of fee supporters. As its own story, the problem is the fee. The people hurt by the fee are briefly mentioned: some would find it painful to pay another \$20 while others simply don't think it's a good idea. The people hurt could include the general public, from the statement "we hear this from the public all the time." The cause of the problem is the arrogance of government, always wanting more tax dollars, despite a bad economy, and paying its workers too much. This is the focus of the text, more than the problem. The villain is Metro. A secondary villain is "the politicians" and perhaps also the "transit lobby." The solution posed here is a public vote on the fee, which the authors are confident will result in it being voted down. The hero could be seen as voters, who should be given the power to block the fee. The hero could also be seen as the County Council, and in particular the four Councilmembers who oppose a Council vote to enact the fee.

This editorial can also be examined as a response to the story of fee supporters. It does not attack proponents' claims that bus cuts are a problem that will hurt people. It simply ignores bus cuts.

It does not counter the claim that the recession is the cause of Metro’s deficit. The article is focused on the solution of proponents – the fee.

5.7 Comparison of Policy Stories

The two primary policy stories in this debate were “Bus Cuts” and “Inefficient, Untrustworthy Government,” shown below in Figures 10 and 11, respectively.

Story: Bus Cuts

Texts: Op-Eds by Daudon and Bachtel

<p>Problem: Bus Cuts Bus cuts will worsen traffic congestion, hurt transit-dependent people, and harm the economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values: Economy, equity, traffic congestion <p><i>Strong: dramatic description of impacts on broad group of people and values</i></p>	<p>Victim: Bus Riders, Car Drivers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt to broaden the victim group to include car drivers • Several letters included stories of personal experience, including bus riders who depend on the bus <p><i>Strong: Vivid portrayal of victims.</i></p>
<p>Cause: Recession The recession caused a drop in Metro’s revenues, forcing a reduction in spending</p> <p><i>Weak: Vague cause, does not connect to solution</i></p>	<p>Villain: None No person or organization was identified as causing the problem</p> <p><i>Weak: No person or group to blame or hold responsible</i></p>
<p>Solution: Fee A temporary solution until the state legislature provides a long-term solution</p>	<p>Hero(ine): County Council The County Council has the power to prevent bus cuts by passing this fee</p>

Figure 10

Story: Inefficient, Untrustworthy Government

Texts: Seattle Times Editorials

<p>Problem: Tax</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts: hurt the economy • Values: <p>Weak problem description. Did not vividly describe impacts of the fee</p>	<p>Victim: Taxpayers/ Car Owners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victims not described in depth • No attempt to broaden victim group <p>Weak victim description</p>
<p>Cause: Metro Inefficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metro pays bus drivers too much and runs empty buses • Politicians always want to raise taxes • Values violated: efficiency, trust <p>Strong cause: specific cause articulated with direct connection to solution</p>	<p>Villain: Metro and Politicians</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government, politicians, and Metro are responsible • Acted with willful intention • No specific individuals named <p>Strong villain: specific organization to blame, acted intentionally</p>
<p>Solution: Stop Tax, Reform Metro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metro should cut bus driver wages and low-ridership bus routes 	<p>Hero(ine): None</p> <p>Did not identify who has the power to solve the problem</p>

Figure 11

In the Bus Cuts story (Figure 10), the bus cuts are the problem, the recession is the cause, and the fee is the solution. In Inefficient Government story, the tax proposal is the problem, the cause is Metro’s inefficiency and arrogant public officials, and the solution is to stop the tax and reform Metro. As mentioned above, the Bus Cuts story has a compelling problem description including who will be hurt by bus cuts; however, it lacks a strong causal story – they do not show a particular person or organization caused the problem, and therefore the link to the solution, the fee, is more tenuous. On the other side, the fee opponents do not go into depth about why a new tax is bad and who is hurt, but focus mostly on Metro inefficiency as the cause of the tax proposal. They have a stronger causal story and villain – it’s the fault of Metro and politicians that taxes may increase.

One difference between the two texts using the Bus Cuts story is how they treat the public and construct the hero of the story. Bachtel’s text, while mentioning the County Council as the decision-

maker, focuses on the public's role in solving this problem. ("We can keep Metro service going.") This could be seen as empowering members of the public. The public is the problem-solver. The business Op-Ed does not describe the public or bus riders as the hero; they are not given any agency in solving this problem. In fact, bus riders will be "pushed off the bus" into their cars. Only the County Council has the power in the situation.

From examining this case, it appears that the Public Policy Story is more prevalent for the proponents of a new policy than for opponents. When a social actor has a solution to push, the Policy Story format may work well to get people's attention, explain how the problem happened, and point to a solution. Of these texts, the two by fee proponents most clearly follow the problem-cause-solution framework. When responding to a policy proposal, there may be less need for a coherent policy story; the higher priority is shooting down the proponents' story. The texts opposing the fee all frame the issue as government inefficiency and untrustworthy public officials. To some extent they all follow the policy story framework, but with a weaker problem statement. Perhaps they don't have to get people's attention with a dramatic problem. Instead, they simply need to sow enough doubt in proponents' problem, cause, or solution. We can see this most clearly with the Ennis Op-Ed, which turned the problem of bus cuts into a solution, supposedly endorsed by Metro itself.

We have seen in this analysis that the Public Policy Story Framework is present in these six editorials and Op-Eds, with use of values appeals throughout the story structure. I will next explore how stories of personal experience, seen in letters to the editor in this debate, formed a part of the two meta policy stories, including their role in portraying characters and appealing to values.

CHAPTER 6: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE STORIES ANALYSIS

Stories of personal experience are frequently combined with appeals to values in a Public Policy Story to enhance the resonance of key characters, generally victims or heroes. As mentioned earlier, a story of personal experience is simply a description of something that happened in an individual’s life. It is not required to have a particular structure. I examined the texts in my study for stories of personal experience and found them in 15 of the 34 letters to the editor. As mentioned in the Methodology section, I included only first-person stories that referred to an individual’s own experiences. The stories generally fell into four general categories: 1.) car owners opposed to the fee; 2.) car owners supporting the fee; 3.) bus riders; and 4.) bus drivers. Some letters fell into more than one category. Most of the stories were people stating how they would be hurt or negatively impacted by events, thus personalizing the victim role. Car owners explained how paying the fee would hurt them; bus riders described how bus cuts would hurt them. Some stories can be seen as attempts by individuals to demonstrate that they are not the villain. Many of the letter writers connected their personal experience to a broader societal value; for example, some car owners opposed to the fee explained how it would hurt them personally and then argued that the fee was unfair. Table 7 shows the four primary personal experience stories, which role the author played in the Policy Story, and what values they appealed to.

Personal Experience Story	Author’s Character	Values
1.) Car owners opposing fee	Victim	Fairness, efficiency
2.) Car owners supporting fee	Hero	Reduce congestion, environment
3.) Bus riders	Victim/ Hero	Equity, environment
4.) Bus drivers	Victim/ Hero	Fairness, hard work

Table 7

Five letters to the editor with a personal experience story were from car owners opposed to the fee; many connected their story to the value of fairness. For example, Ana Foukimoana wrote “I live five

miles from the nearest bus stop with no safe place to park my car.... I have no option but to drive my car. To tax me is unfair because Metro does not provide an option for me.” Some car owners brought up equity, stating that they could not afford the fee. For example, Elizabeth Jourdan wrote, “I’m a retired senior on a fixed income, and I cannot pay \$100 for tabs on a PT Cruiser.” Some car owners who opposed the fee cast themselves as hardworking families. For example, Eric Graham wrote, “If the Metro transit system is in trouble, cut the workers' hours or wages; don't raise fees and punish people who prefer to drive the cars they worked hard to buy.” We don’t know what effect these letters had on readers, but the literature could suggest a couple of reactions. First, other car owners who don’t ride the bus and are worried about the fee cost might relate to one or more of these authors and it could convince them to oppose the fee. A different type of reaction would be a bus rider who does not own a car getting an insight into how the fee may affect others.

Five letters with stories of personal experience were from car owners supporting the fee. Many took pains to identify themselves as people who would have to pay the fee but nevertheless supported it. They seemed to think that identifying themselves as fee payers added to their credibility when stating their support. Some of the letters focused on how transit service would help them personally, such as by saving them money when they take transit, rather than appealing to broader values. For example, Mark Dublin wrote (7/24/11): “Speaking as a motorist, the better the public transit, the longer my car lasts, period. Even at 40 mpg — my great 2001 Prius — two years of proposed tab increases would go into the gas tank every week. Make transit good enough so I can save the car for pleasure driving, and any necessary tab increases will put my money ahead.” We can assume that this is an appeal to other car drivers to see how transit could help them.

Three letters with stories of personal experience were from bus riders, stating how public transit helped them personally. Priya Singh (7/20/11) wrote:

“My two children and I rely on public transit for everything. We use it to go to the doctor, to school and work, to pick up groceries or visit our friends. Many of the routes near our house are

already packed during peak hours, at times with buses even driving by stops. These cuts would drastically change our lives because we would have to leave significantly earlier and spend hours and hours more per week on the bus. We cannot afford to buy a car in order to make our lives more convenient. We need Metro service to live our day-to-day lives.”

While Singh did not directly appeal to societal values, the implicit connection is to the value of helping the needy and the value of equity – that everyone should have access to transportation.

Three bus drivers authored letters and used their personal story to deny the claim that bus drivers make too much money and show that the job is difficult and important. For example, Christopher Osburn wrote “In 2010, I moved 35,000 riders from point A to point B and earned \$14,400. Metro provides an essential service, and I am proud to be a small part of that effort.” In some ways these letters attempt to reposition bus drivers from villains (overpaid) to heroes (performing an essential public service). Robert Duncan wrote (8/15/11):

“I am a Metro driver, and I am sick to death of these people who complain about our salaries. Would any of you, do a job in which you have no breaks because the schedules are so tight you can’t make them? There’s no time to go to the rest room; we don’t have a scheduled lunch break; we don’t all go to lunch at noon. I work 50 to 60 hours a week to make \$60,000. I get up at 3 a.m. and work until 6 p.m. I deal with some terrible customers. I try to be very friendly, even if they are yelling at me, spitting on me, calling me every name in the book. I challenge people to come with me for a day or even a week, and do what I do. Even with all this, I love my job and I meet some of the most interesting people in the world. Would any of these people who think we don’t deserve the pay we receive drive a 60-foot bus in traffic safely in all types of weather?”

Personal experience stories played several roles in this debate. The stories personalized and amplified the victim characters, whether car owner or bus rider, making that victim group more resonant to the audience. These stories were also used as an attempt to re-brand some characters and move them from one part of the story to another – for example bus drivers moving from villain to victim and/or hero. Though not always present in a Public Policy Story, personal experience stories can make a story stronger and more resonant and meaningful to the audience.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

7.1 Public Policy Story

My analysis shows that the Public Policy Story framework, including value appeals and personal experience stories, is useful for analyzing the structure of public policy debates by demonstrating the role played by each plot element and character. We saw that fee supporters focused on a dramatic problem and attempting to expand the victim group, but their cause was vague, not connected to the solution, and their story did not include a villain. In narrative theory, the essence of a story is connecting events to each other. The policy story will be stronger if the problem, cause, and solution are connected. The lack of a cause means we don't have the first piece of the narrative – why something happened. The cause is also the key plot element that connects to the solution.

7.2 Values

This case shows the effectiveness of framing an issue by highlighting particular values, primarily in the problem or cause parts of the story. Fee opponents framed the issue as being about Metro's inefficiency and put supporters on the defensive. Opponents did not engage in the other side's value appeals and thus kept the focus on Metro.

In looking at the value appeals in this debate, we can see that it is primarily a debate about the role of government. A strong distrust of government and aversion to taxes was the driving force behind fee opponents. The secondary values of voter participation and trust aligned with efficiency as part of a general anti-government message. The values of efficiency, economy, and traffic reduction were used to persuade others, but were not core beliefs by the participants.

7.3 Character Portrayal and Personal Stories

This case demonstrates the importance of how a public policy story portrays people and groups. By including or excluding groups and making them active or passive, the story can influence the audience's perception of these groups. For example, most fee opponents did not include bus riders in their stories; by making them invisible, they make the problem of bus cuts less tangible and meaningful. Other fee opponents implied that bus riders were not worthy of being subsidized. Meanwhile, fee supporters included car owners in their messages by arguing that transit reduces traffic congestion, thus benefiting drivers.

Almost all of the texts in this case portrayed the "common people" in the debate, bus riders and car drivers, as passive and being acted upon. This could be considered the opposite of a mobilizing strategy and could make these groups feel powerless. The people and groups who were portrayed in an active way were primarily politicians and Metro.

Bus drivers were described as passive beneficiaries of Metro by the Times editorials and as villains by some letter writers. The Bachtel Op-Ed and three letters by bus drivers attempted to switch this character from bad guys to victims and heroes. By stating what their experience is like driving a bus and how much money they earn, the letters tell a direct, personal, and powerful story of what it means to be a bus driver, re-creating themselves as victims and heroes.

Most of the experience stories were people stating how they would be hurt or negatively impacted by events, thus personalizing the victim role. A number of writers who told of their own experience were writing from a defensive posture. This included some of the car drivers opposed to the fee, who spoke of being "punished" for driving. And it includes the car drivers who support the fee, some of whom felt they were part of the problem. They used the act of telling something about themselves and their life in order to show that they are a good person. They transformed themselves from villain to victim (or in some cases hero).

7.4 Finding Common Ground

When examining a policy debate, using the framework of the Public Policy Story can help an observer or participant identify where people agree and where they disagree. Most important is whether they agree on what the problem is, or which of several problems is most important. In this case we can see that the two primary sides did not necessarily disagree that bus cuts were a problem, but disagreed on the importance and urgency of that problem. To the Seattle Times editorial board, a tax increase is a far worse problem than bus cuts. Further, the two sides disagreed on the cause of the cuts, which led to different solutions.

From this case it doesn't appear that identifying values that both sides employ in a debate helps identify common ground. For example, fee opponents used the value of efficiency as a reason to not pass the tax and fee supporters argued that Metro was efficient. Both sides used the same value, but used it to argue for opposite policy actions.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The Public Policy Story framework shows how to create a persuasive policy argument through construction of a problem, cause, and solution, with corresponding victim, villain, and hero. Woven throughout the story are appeals to audience values, while stories of personal experience amplify the victim and hero characters. This framework can be applied to any public policy debate by examining the structure of each argument for these plot and character components. Depending on one's purpose, this can be used to strengthen a policy story, attack another's policy story, or find common ground when two sides agree on a problem. The framework can also be used to examine which players are missing in a policy debate and how different characters are constructed. Becoming both more careful consumers and producers of communication messages will help planners, policy analysts, advocates, and the public at large reduce manipulation and understand the power of language.

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