



July 16, 2014

Dear Seattle Transportation Benefit District Board Members:

This spring, the Transit Riders Union critically supported and actively campaigned for King County's Proposition 1. This was a difficult decision for our organization, and for many of our allies, because sales tax and flat car tab fees are deeply regressive and unfair funding mechanisms. We swallowed this bitter pill because we knew that King County had no better options to prevent service cuts.

The City of Seattle, however, does have more progressive options. We urge you to remove the sales tax increase and, acting as the City Council, pass an Employee Hours Tax and a Commercial Parking Fee increase. As you know, Washington State has the most regressive tax system in the nation. Olympia has failed us again and again; as the elected representatives of the people of Seattle, you now have the opportunity and the moral obligation to show local leadership in reversing this situation.

We have yet to hear any good reasons why the amendment put forward by Councilmembers Sawant and Licata should not be passed. The Employee Hours Tax amounts to less than a penny per employee hour; the Commercial Parking Fee increase, in addition to being more progressive than a flat car tab fee, will encourage public transit use and decrease congestion in Seattle's urban core. We understand that the Chamber of Commerce is opposed to an Employee Hours Tax and that the University of Washington is opposed to a Commercial Parking Fee Increase. But these are not good reasons – this is merely political pressure from powerful organizations. *We challenge the TBD Board Members to offer reasons why they do not support choosing the most progressive available funding options for Metro.*

The only argument we have heard so far that holds any water is Councilmember Rasmussen's statement at the Seattle TBD meeting on July 10, 2014 that “We're going to need all the funding options available to us for transit and transit service.” It is true that the proposed resolution and amendments being considered would only generate enough funding to “stop the bleeding,” and our public transit needs go far beyond this.

If Sawant and Licata's proposal is not adopted by the Transportation Benefit District, the Employee Hours Tax and Commercial Parking Tax could still be passed by the City Council to expand and improve services. Among many other possibilities, additional funding might be used to:

- Restore the rest of Seattle's endangered service;
- Increase, improve and modernize Night Owl service;
- Add much-needed service hours in underserved and transit-dependent areas of the city;
- Contribute to the chronically underfunded Human Services Ticket Program;
- Contribute to King County's new low income reduced fare program to buy down the reduced fare from \$1.50 to \$1.00 or \$1.25, as would have happened had Proposition 1 passed.

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If the Seattle TBD Board elects to ask voters to approve yet another regressive sales tax increase, in addition to a flat vehicle license fee, at the very least the business community should also be required to contribute to maintaining and improving the public transit system that gets their workers to work and without which commerce cannot function, and a Commercial Parking Fee increase should also be passed to generate additional funding.

The Transit Riders Union and our allies need to know that the Council is serious about spreading the burden of funding our basic infrastructure to at least this extent. Without this assurance, it may be difficult for our membership to support the regressive funding mechanisms that will likely be on the November ballot.

With this in mind, we ask all the councilmembers to provide us with written answers to the following questions. We would appreciate a response before the July 23 Finance and Culture Committee Meeting at which the Employee Hours Tax and Commercial Parking Fee increase will first be considered. Thank you for taking time to share your thoughts on these issues with your constituents.

Sincerely,



Katie Wilson
TRU general secretary

QUESTIONS

1. If you do not support removing the sales tax increase in favor of more progressive funding options, what are your reasons?
2. Do you agree with CM Rasmussen that “we're going to need all the funding options available to us for transit and transit service”?
3. If the Seattle TBD Boards passes the Mayor's proposed resolution with the sales tax included, will you support also passing an Employee Hours Tax on business?
4. If the Seattle TBD Boards passes the Mayor's proposed Resolution with the sales tax included, will you support also increasing the Commercial Parking Fee?
5. Will you vote for the Employee Hours Tax and/or the Commercial Parking Fee increase at the July 23, 2014 committee meeting?
6. If the Employee Hours Tax and/or the Commercial Parking Fee increase are not passed this summer, will you work actively to ensure their passage by the end of this year?

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