



CITY OF KIRKLAND

Department of Public Works

123 Fifth Avenue, Kirkland, WA 98033 425.587.3800

www.kirklandwa.gov

MEMORANDUM

To: Kurt Triplett, City Manager

From: David Godfrey, P.E., Transportation Engineering Manager
Ray Steiger, P.E., Public Works Director

Date: June 23, 2011

Subject: LETTER REGARDING KING COUNTY CONGESTION RELIEF CHARGE

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council, review the attached letter and authorize the Mayor to sign a letter to the King County Council regarding a proposed congestion relief charge.

BACKGROUND

Summary

At their June 21 meeting Council received information from King County Metro staff concerning a proposal from the County Executive to enact a 2 year, \$20/vehicle annual license fee in order to fund Metro's operations. More background material is available at the [Metro website](#). The Council directed staff to prepare a draft letter in support of the fee with options to be further discussed by the Council.

In their last session, the State Legislature passed SB 5457 authorizing King County to impose a Congestion Reduction Charge of up to \$20 per vehicle license to be used to fund operational and capital needs of transit agencies. A two-thirds majority of the County Council could impose the fee or it could be imposed upon passage by a simple majority of the voters. The charge would become effective six months after its passage and remain in effect for two years. On June 20, the King County Executive asked the King County Council to adopt the charge.

More than 60% of King County Metro Transit's operating funds come from sales tax revenue. Due to declines in this revenue, the transit agency is facing an ongoing annual funding shortfall of about \$60 million per year. If additional funding is not received, a service cut of approximately 17% of service hours system wide would be made over the next two years, beginning with service reductions in February of 2012. This would include cuts in service in Kirkland (see below). Over the past 2 years, King County Metro reduced the funding shortfall by approximately \$400 million by measures including fare increases, redirection of taxes, spending of reserves and cuts in capital projects.

Coupled with expenditures of Metro's reserve funds, the congestion charge revenues would be adequate to maintain the existing number of hours in the Metro system for the next two years. With or without the charge, ongoing service would be adjusted in accordance with the new Strategic Plan and Service Guidelines. This means that even though the total number of hours in the system would remain constant there might still be changes in routes. It is anticipated

that a sustainable funding plan would be developed by the time that the congestion charge sunsets.

Implications for Kirkland

A \$20/year vehicle license charge would generate about \$1.1 million/year from Kirkland residents. Imposition of the King County charge would not prohibit the City from instating a Transportation Benefit District charge.

A list of [initial service cuts and route deletions](#) has been proposed by the County Executive for implementation in February if additional funding is not provided. Kirkland routes affected are:

Route	Action
236 between Kirkland and Woodinville via Totem Lake link to route map	Discontinue service after 7:00 Link to current schedule
238 between Kirkland and Bothell via Totem Lake link to route map	Discontinue service after 7:00 Link to current schedule
277 between Juanita and U-District via Totem Lake, Rose Hill and Houghton P&R. link to route map	Delete route Link to current schedule
930 between Redmond and Totem Lake via Willows Road link to route map	Reduce frequency from 30 minute to 60 minutes Link to current schedule
935 between Kenmore and Totem Lake via Juanita and Bastyr University link to route map	Reduce peak frequency from 60 minute to off peak frequency from 60 minutes to 120 minutes Link to current schedule

Based on work done for the Metro Strategic Plan, if Metro does not get additional funding, future cuts in Kirkland may include the routes in the table below. However with tolling on the SR 520 bridge, ridership, and therefore productivity, may increase on routes serving Seattle. This could reprioritize the routes designated for changes.

Route number/ between	Change to service
245/ Downtown Kirkland Factoria	Reduce weekend to hourly service
248/ Downtown Kirkland Avondale	Reduce peak and off peak to hourly service
252*/ Kingsgate to Seattle CBD	Route deleted
257*/Kingsgate Seattle CBD	Route deleted
260*/Juanita Seattle CBD	Route deleted
265*/Redmond Seattle CBD	Route deleted
* Peak hour route	

As stated above, the Congestion Reduction Charge plus the spending of reserves would preserve the number of service hours in the overall system. But because Metro's new service guidelines will be used to make the system more productive, it is possible that service will change in Kirkland. Changes are likely to be restructures – reallocation of existing hours amongst routes; rather than pure cuts – elimination of hours. For example, there are several routes that serve Totem Lake and that are in the lower 25% of productivity in Metro's system. A restructure might look at these routes as a group and while keeping the total number of hours constant, would subtract from some routes and add to others. Or perhaps a route would be eliminated, but service would be added to other routes. Any changes would be preceded by a public process and have to be approved by the King County Council.

Options for Council Action

1. Support King County Council adoption of the congestion charge. This would be the quickest way to implement the charge (the charge does not become effective until six months after its passage).
2. Support presenting the congestion charge to King County voters.
3. Option 1 or 2, but with caveats such as tying support to requiring spending of reserves along with the congestion charge to minimize service impacts.
4. Do not support the congestion charge

The attached letter reflects option 1 with a condition requiring Metro reserves to be spent to minimize the size of the system cuts necessary over the next two years. It can be rewritten as necessary to reflect the decision of the Council.

July 6, 2011

King County Council
516 Third Ave., Rm. 1200
Seattle, WA 98104

D R A F T

Dear Councilmembers:

The economic slowdown of the past two years has been difficult for the citizens of King County. The City of Kirkland has faced reductions in service in almost all our operations. As an agency relying heavily on sales tax revenues the effects of the current downturn have been particularly acute for King County Metro.

Recognizing this, we carefully considered Executive Constantine's proposal to the King County Council for adoption of an annual congestion charge of \$20 per vehicle for the next two years. The Kirkland City Council recommends the County Council adopt the proposed charge. We make this recommendation for several reasons:

- The charge will be in place for only 2 years. This will allow an opportunity to find a sustainable funding solution and allow time for a full discussion with leaders in Olympia.
- The magnitude of the cuts that would be required over the next two years, if the charge is not adopted, is too large at a time when more and more people are depending on reliable transit service. In Kirkland, many routes would be deleted and most others would be reduced in some manner.
- King County Metro has shown good faith in attempting to close the funding gap. Almost \$400 million of the gap has been reduced through fare increases, implementing operating efficiencies and one time funding solutions.

This recommendation is predicated on the condition that Metro's financial reserves will be used over the next two years along with the congestion charge revenue to keep as much service on the streets as possible.

Our City Council recently had the chance to review the Strategic Plan and Service Guidelines that were passed by the Regional Transit Committee. The successful completion of these documents represent a large and complicated body of work, and we thank you for your support of this effort. Your passage of the congestion charge plan is an important step in allowing the full promise of the Plan to be fulfilled.

Sincerely,

Kirkland City Council

By Joan McBride, Mayor