



CITY OF KIRKLAND

Department of Public Works

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To: Dave Ramsay, City Manager

From: Daryl Grigsby, Public Works Director
David Godfrey, P.E., Transportation Engineering Manager

Date: August 20, 2009

Subject: LETTER TO KING COUNTY ON METRO TRANSIT FUNDING

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council authorize the Mayor to sign the attached letter.

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION:

At their July 22 meeting, the Transportation Commission discussed the Metro Transit budget shortfall. Metro staff was present to answer questions. This was a follow up to the April meeting where the Commission began its discussions, after receiving a presentation from Metro. It was clear that even with cost savings, keeping smaller reserves and other efficiencies, service will need to be reduced to balance the Metro budget. The Commission arrived at the following conclusions.

Build service around all day routes that perform well in one or more standard measures of effectiveness such as passengers carried per platform hour. Although this may not be the position of most eastside jurisdictions, it is likely to benefit Kirkland. Kirkland has several all day routes, 255 (between Brickyard P&R and Seattle), 230 (between Kingsgate and Bellevue/Redmond) and 245 (between Kirkland and Factoria via South Rose Hill and Overlake) that are strong performers. Developing a strong set of core routes was seen as preferable to, for example, reducing frequencies on all routes. The Commission felt strongly that a system of fewer routes with excellent service is preferable to a system of more routes of mediocre quality. A few high performing peak hour routes should complement all day service. Restructuring service along with cuts is also important. For example, as discussed previously by Council, if the Route 255 ended at Kingsgate P&R instead of Brickyard P&R, increased peak hour frequency could be provided with no additional service hours.

Give the highest priority to routes that serve dense, multi use areas where parking supply is limited and pay parking is in place. This is not to say that Kirkland or the eastside should not get its fair share of service. This strategy allows Kirkland to take

advantage of the land use patterns it has developed and encourages transit service where it works best.

Implement innovative programs for increasing revenue and decreasing costs. Recently produced information on cross-Lake ferries indicates that ridership will be low and costs to provide the service will be relatively high. After reviewing this information, the Commission recommends that new ferry service from Kirkland and other cities be delayed until it is more cost effective and that ferry district tax revenue be moved to fund Metro service. Most of the cost of an hour of transit service comes from the cost of providing the driver. Metro should examine these costs and others to see if savings can be achieved. There may be other creative ideas such as parking charges or extra charges for premium service that are worth further consideration. The Commission felt that it is reasonable for fares to cover 30% of Metro's operating expenses.

Continue to support partnerships that leverage funding. The SR 520 Urban Partnership Grant provides funding for additional coaches for the SR 520 corridor. It does not provide funding for service. Because of the benefits to Kirkland of Metro service on SR 520, and because tolling is scheduled to begin next year on SR 520, additional service is critical. The Commission supports using property tax (as authorized by the State Legislature) to provide this service. Although Rapid Ride (Metro's proposed Bus Rapid Transit) would not directly serve Kirkland, it allows Metro to leverage federal funding and follows the principle of providing high quality service on core routes.

The attached letter was reviewed and edited by the Transportation Commission.

September 3, 2009

D R A F T

Kurt Triplett, King County Executive
401 5th Avenue, Suite 800
Seattle, WA 98104

Dow Constantine, Chair, King County Council
516 3rd Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Sirs:

Discussions are taking place across the County concerning solutions to Metro's budget crisis. We support your facilitation of such discussions. The following four principles are offered for your consideration as you continue to grapple with this difficult problem.

Build service around all day routes that perform well in one or more standard measures of effectiveness such as passengers carried per platform hour. This will focus service on routes that carry the most riders per dollar of expenditure. These routes tend to run on corridors that are destinations in themselves and that serve regional centers. They also tend to serve those who are transit dependent. In Kirkland such routes include 230, 245 and 255. We fear that reducing service uniformly, while it will spread out the impacts, will water down the remaining service and the entire system will be weaker. Maintaining some productive peak hour routes is also important to compliment all day service. Service restructures should complement cuts where appropriate to maximize the effectiveness of the system.

Give the highest priority to routes that serve dense, multi use areas where parking supply is limited and pay parking is in place. The Council continues to support additional service in Kirkland and on the Eastside, because the current subarea service allocation is far out of balance with subarea revenue generation. Within subareas, transit should serve the types of land use where it has the best chance to be effective. Downtown Kirkland is an excellent example of such an area.

Implement innovative programs for increasing revenue and decreasing costs. Based on ridership forecasts and projected costs, cross Lake Washington ferry routes are not a wise investment when compared to bus service. The County should redirect property tax revenue from the Ferry District to Metro. This should include increasing the fraction of operating expenses that comes from fares. Expecting fares to support 30% of operating expenses is higher than Metro's

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current target, but is not unreasonable. King County should consider charging for parking at Park and Rides where occupancies are above 85%. Reducing expenses by cutting labor costs and reducing services that do not directly support increased ridership should also be part of a cost control strategy.

Continue to support partnerships that leverage funding. Because tolling will begin on SR 520 next year, the opportunity to increase Metro bus service across SR 520 through the Urban Partnership Agreement must not be lost. Coaches are being funded by the grant and service can be funded by exercising the property tax option given to Metro by the State Legislature. The Rapid Ride components of the voter approved Transit Now measure allow Metro to secure federal funds for capital elements and should continue to be funded.

Thank you once again for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,
Kirkland City Council

By James L. Lauinger, Mayor