

December 11, 2018

**DRAFT AS OF 11/30/2018**

Rob Gannon, General Manager  
King County Metro Transit  
King Street Center, KSC-TR-0415  
201 South Jackson Street  
Seattle, WA 98104-3836

Peter Rogoff, CEO  
Sound Transit  
Union Station  
401 South Jackson Street  
Seattle, WA 98104

Subject: Metro North Eastside Mobility Project and Sound Transit Proposed Route 544

Dear Mr. Gannon & Mr. Rogoff:

This letter expresses the City of Kirkland's general support for the transit service network changes proposed in Option B of the North Eastside Mobility Project (NEMP), and the companion proposal to create the new Sound Transit Route 544. The City of Kirkland has appreciated the collaborative nature of the NEMP, and the City Council and City staff look forward to continuing to work with King County Metro and Sound Transit as the project moves forward to implementation.

Our support for Option B is based on the fact that the proposed network reinvests all of the Metro service hours saved by truncating Metro Route 255 at the University of Washington Link Station into North Eastside communities, particularly Kirkland. It is also based on the commitment of King County Metro and its partners to complete all of the new infrastructure projects that improve the transfer environment at the Montlake Triangle in advance of the September 2019 service change. Our support also hinges on the assumption that Sound Transit's proposed 544 will replace and enhance South Lake Union transit service lost by truncating the 255. These system improvements are critical to supporting Eastside transit trips.

Big changes in how transit operates in Seattle will have a significant impact on the operation of Metro Route 255, which is the City of Kirkland's most frequent and highest ridership route. If the route remains unchanged and continues to go directly to downtown Seattle the closure of the SR 520 Montlake Freeway Station will result in current 255 riders no longer being able to access the Montlake area and the University of Washington, and the closure of the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel to buses will result in the 255 operating on congested surface streets. To address these issues, Option B proposes truncating the 255 at the University of Washington Link Station, which will provide riders with more reliable service, and similar or better travel times to downtown Seattle by transferring to Link Light Rail.

Truncating the 255 at the UW presented King County Metro in partnership with our community the opportunity to improve transit service in the City of Kirkland for the first time in two decades. We believe that overall the proposed Option B will maintain and grow ridership by increasing the span and frequency of transit service, eliminating poor performing routes, and

improving travel times between key destinations. There are some additional issues that need to be addressed before the service network is finalized in order to provide a high quality, convenient transit network that serves all members of our community equitably.

**Cash Payments can Double Fares.** Our primary concern is with equity and social justice. Individuals who do not have access to ORCA cards through employers or schools often are underserved or unemployed. These same individuals may not have a way to get to central ORCA card distribution sites. Those individuals tend to pay cash fares. In many instances, what is currently a single-fare trip in the future will require transfers between King County Metro and Sound Transit. The inability of cash payments to transfer between transit providers effectively results in some trips requiring a second fare payment. This doubles the cost of a trip, creating a hardship for riders paying with cash. We are concerned about the long-term impact of this increased financial burden and request that Sound Transit and King County Metro mitigate this problem by aggressively distributing free ORCA cards in advance of the service change and provide ORCA card vending machines at key transit hubs in Kirkland. We also would like to see this issue addressed system-wide in the long term.

**ORCA Card Availability.** As mentioned above, currently it is very difficult to secure any type of ORCA card on the Eastside that is not a regular adult fare card. It is important that King County Metro work with Eastside partners to make it so people on the Eastside who qualify to obtain a youth, low income (LIFT), or senior ORCA card can obtain their card as easily as a regular adult fare ORCA card. This creates more equitable access for all potential transit customers and will grow the population of transit riders. In many cases, people who qualify for those ORCA cards may be some of the most transit dependent users.

**Communication.** Launching extensive and ongoing public outreach regarding the changes in transit service is critical to its overall success. The concepts of Community Ride and Community Van are new and not well understood among seasoned riders, not to mention those new to transit. In Kirkland, there also are diverse populations and making service understandable and accessible for non-English speakers will contribute greatly to how much these service changes benefit the community.

**Community Ride/Van.** How these services are able to serve daily commutes and habits, as well as unique trips, needs to be clearly communicated on an on-going basis. Additionally, we request annual reports evaluating how effective these services are at serving our community, so we can work with King County Metro to make any necessary adjustments to improve the effectiveness of these services.

**Metro Route 255 Restructure.** Route 255 has been a time-proven, dependable transit link between Kirkland and downtown Seattle; so it is important that the new route is safe, convenient, and dependable from Day One of implementation. We would like to work with King County Metro and other stakeholders to advocate for maintaining transit reliability along the entire corridor. Of particular importance is maintaining transit reliability and priority through the SR-520/Montlake Interchange during WSDOT construction of the "Rest of the West" projects, including the continued availability of the SR-520 bus-only westbound exit ramp to Montlake Boulevard.

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**Sound Transit Proposed Route 544.** Sound Transit's proposal to establish a new route 544 that will provide Regional Express transit service between Overlake, South Kirkland, and South Lake Union using reallocated resources from low performing SR-520 Corridor Regional Express transit routes will be welcomed by many riders. Our support for merging routes 541 and 542 into the 544 is contingent on: 1) the implementation of the rest of Option B; 2) the guarantee that the new route will serve the South Kirkland Park and Ride; and 3) that the route will provide bi-directional, peak period weekday service with headways of 15 minutes or less.

We have also attached detailed technical comments regarding the specific implementation of routes included in Option B and the proposed Route 544.

The City of Kirkland looks forward to continued collaboration with our regional partners to improve access and mobility within Kirkland and throughout the region.

Sincerely,  
Kirkland City Council

Amy Walen  
Mayor

Cc: King County Councilmember Claudia Balducci  
King County Councilmember Rod Dembowski  
King County Councilmember Kathy Lambert  
King County Executive Dow Constantine  
Washington State Secretary of Transportation Roger Millar



