



King County

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May 25, 2022

The Honorable Claudia Balducci
Chair, King County Council
Room 1200
C O U R T H O U S E

Dear Councilmember Balducci:

This letter transmits a proposed Ordinance, that would, if enacted, establish a zero-fare policy that would allow passengers 18 years of age and under to ride free of charge on all modes of transit provided by the King County Metro Transit Department.

Approval of this proposed legislation would expand mobility for thousands of youth countywide, including many in financial need who do not have access to subsidized fares. Eighty percent of the more than 24,000 high school students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch in King County do not currently have access to a subsidized youth ORCA card. This proposed Ordinance aligns with King County Metro's Strategic Plan for Public Transportation, 2021-2031, as adopted by Ordinance 19367, which includes a strategy to "align fares with other service providers, meet revenue targets, and advance equity through Metro's income-based approach to fares."

The urgency of this legislation is due to the requirements of the Move Ahead Washington transportation investment program recently approved by the Washington State Legislature. The Move Ahead Washington legislation added a new section to the Revised Code of Washington chapter 47.66 establishing a transit support grant program for the purpose of providing financial support to transit agencies for operating and capital expenses. To be eligible to receive grant funding from this program during the 2023-2025 biennium, the Move Ahead Washington legislation requires that a transit agency must, among other things, meet an October 1, 2022 deadline to submit documentation to show that it has adopted a zero-fare policy that allows passengers eighteen years of age and younger to ride free of charge on all modes provided by the agency. That said, Metro seeks to implement this policy earlier than October 1 to align with school start dates.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Metro generated an estimated \$10M per year from youth fares. The Move Ahead Washington legislation provides King County Metro the opportunity to be eligible for an allocation of state funding, provided that Metro reduces youth fares to \$0. It is estimated that Metro would receive \$32M annually from the state for this program. Reducing

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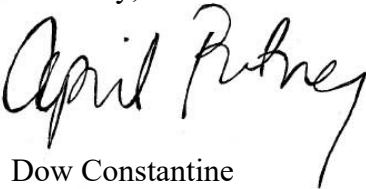
youth fares to \$0 and accessing annual state funds would expand access to transit for young people while sustaining the revenue necessary to fund vital public transit service. Our upcoming biennial budget proposal for 2023-2024 will include more detailed information regarding expenditure of these potential funds.

The proposed legislation furthers the King County Strategic Plan goals of mobility and economic vitality by providing more equitable mobility access and reducing historic gaps, exercising sound financial and risk management and building King County's long-term fiscal strength, and helping youth to achieve self-sufficiency and be contributing members of society.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposed Ordinance. This legislation will help strengthen the region for generations to come by ensuring access to state transit investment program funds that will help support vital public transit service and, by eliminating fare barriers, increase access to education and opportunity for the youth of King County and beyond.

If your staff have any questions, please contact Christina O'Claire, Director, Mobility Division, Metro Transit Department, at 206-477-5801.

Sincerely,

 for

Dow Constantine
King County Executive

Enclosure

cc: King County Councilmembers

ATTN: Stephanie Cirkovich, Chief of Staff

Melani Pedroza, Clerk of the Council

Shannon Braddock, Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive

Karan Gill, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive

Mina Hashemi, Council Relations Director, Office of the Executive

Terry White, General Manager, Metro Transit Department