



The Transit Reader

The Official Newsletter of the Transit Riders Union

www.transitriders.org

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Fare Hikes! No Good for Anyone

By Katie Wilson

Seattle wants better public transit, and more of it. Most voters are willing to pay for it, too. This was proved last November, when over 60% voted yes for new car tab fees and a sales tax increase that will go toward expanding Metro bus service in Seattle.

Starting this March, riders will be paying more for public transit in a more direct manner. King County Metro will raise all fares – peak and off-peak, senior, disabled and youth – by \$0.25. This fare hike was planned way back in 2011, and it completes the doubling of the

standard fare from \$1.25 to \$2.50 in a span of just eight years.

More regressive taxes and higher fares: the same trends are being repeated in cities across the country. Is this just the price we must pay to get around our fair city, in this era of budget cuts and austerity?

Not everyone *can* pay this price – and of course it's the very riders who need public transit the most who can least afford fare hikes, or even any fare at all. As fares have gone up and up, we're squeezed more and more. So, like the citizens we are in the democracy we're

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If Tallinn, Why Not Seattle?

By Beau Morton

The death of the free ride zones in Seattle and Portland in 2012 drew to a close the large-scale experiments with fare-free transit in major American cities. Tax payers and local governments have felt the 40-year squeeze of neoliberal policies and austerity-based solutions that have continually shifted the funding of our transit systems onto the backs of poor and working class riders through the double burden of regressive, sales tax-dependent funding and large and continual fare increases to address the widening budget gaps that transit agencies face around the country. As of March 1, fares on King County Metro buses will have doubled since 2008.

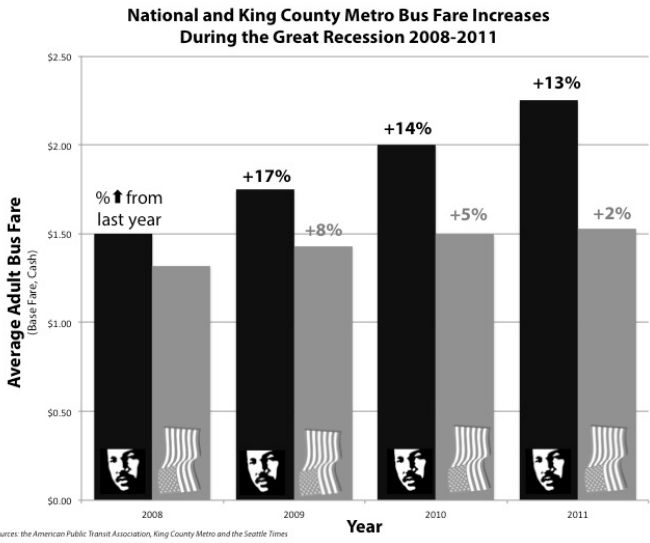
Fare hikes have increasingly become the go-to option for covering budget deficits.

Is there another way? Could we actually have fare-free transit? It might seem like a dream, but Tallinn, the capitol of Estonia with a population of almost 440,000, decided to do just that in January 2013. After battling around the idea for a few years, the local government ran an initiative to the people asking if they wanted the transit system in Tallinn to be fare-free for residents. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 76% of Tallinn voters said yes, and Tallinn has had a popular and successful fare-free transit system for two years.

So, what does happen when a transit system goes fare-free? While it might differ a bit by

Tallinn has had a successful fare-free transit system for two years!

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Abolish Fares

By David McDonald

Every time Metro needs money the issue of who will pay arises. The burden falls on the poor and the poorest. A yearly pass for seniors was \$99 when I started driving in 2007; it is now about \$360. The youth fare was \$.25. It is now \$.75. These are stupendous increases.

Only a small portion of transit funding now comes directly from riders. Most comes from federal, state and local taxes. I believe all transit should be completely funded by stable tax levies and that fares should be abolished.

Since transit is already *mostly* tax-funded, surely there can be no principled argument against *total* tax funding. If everyone pays for roads, highways, and tunnels through taxes, whether they use them or not, why shouldn't the minimum means to *use* the roads *also* be socially funded?

Everyone already pays taxes so no one will get a free ride were fares abolished. Not only do the poorest pay a larger percentage of their

income in taxes than the well-off, they also pay a *larger absolute dollar amount* through "sin" taxes on tobacco, alcohol, and lottery tickets than Boeing (for instance), which pays nothing.

Costs of the Fare System

The fare system is both *inefficient* and *loaded with huge overhead costs*, all of which would go away if fares were abolished.

Paying fares *slows down loading* significantly. Every cash fare transaction slows the bus down by an average of 5 or 6 seconds. No matter what, there is always someone (usually more than one) not ready to pay the fare; ORCA cards have a high fail-to-read rate. It is always slower to load even if everyone has an ORCA card. Only one door is used.

In the case of the RapidRide buses all doors are opened, but the cost of this efficiency in boarding is the huge overhead of the Fare Enforcement system, which includes recruiting, training, uni-

The Low Income Fare: Coming March 1! Now, what do you want to know?

How much is the reduced fare, and how much does a reduced fare ORCA card cost?

The reduced fare is \$1.50 per ride, for any time of day, one-zone or two-zone travel. You can pay per ride, or get a monthly pass for \$54. The ORCA LIFT card is free once you qualify and it's valid for 24 months. If it gets lost or damaged, a replacement costs \$5.

How do I qualify?

Your income must be below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (see chart). To show that you are eligible you'll need

Household Size	200% of Federal Poverty Guidelines
1	\$23,340
2	\$31,460
3	\$39,580
4	\$47,700
5	\$55,820
6	\$63,940

forming and supervising a slurry of Fare Enforcement agents, giving them rooms to meet in, radios to communicate with, technology to check the ORCA cards, paperwork and computers to keep track of fare-evaders and so on. Then there is the impossibility of collecting \$124.00 fines from people who do not have \$2.25 for bus fare and burdening them with civil offenses

to present documentation, such as an award letter for EBT food stamps or SSI, a ProviderOne medical services card, paystubs or tax return. A full list of acceptable documents can be found at www.orcalift.com.

When and where can I get an ORCA LIFT card?

You can order one now and it will be mailed to you starting February 1! Here are some of the places you can go to qualify: YWCA; Seattle-King County Department of Public Health; Compass Housing; Catholic Community Services; El Centro de la Raza; Multi-Service Center; Refugee Women's Alliance; Within Reach; Global to Local. When you get your card, it won't have any value on it yet. You can pay for E-purse value or a monthly pass at an ORCA customer service center (King Street Center,

401 S. Jackson), ticket vending machine, or ORCA retailer.

Can I pay the reduced fare with cash?

Nope, you must have an ORCA LIFT card.

Can I use my ORCA LIFT card on Sound Transit?

Link Light Rail is also introducing a \$1.50 low-income reduced fare starting March 1, but Sound Transit buses are not. You can still use your card on ST buses and other services that accept ORCA, but you'll have to pay the full fare – if you are using the monthly pass, you can make up the difference with E-Purse or cash. Kitsap Transit and the King County Water Taxi also have a low-income fare.

More questions? They may (or may not) be answered here:
www.orcalift.com

and debt. Fare Enforcement is an entire bureaucracy unto itself that contributes nothing to getting buses down the road. Plus it is inherently offensive.

My bottom line: opening all doors on all buses to load would have the same effect as adding another 10% (130 buses!) to the fleet at no capital cost whatsoever.

In addition to inefficiencies, there are fare-related overhead costs that add nothing to service.

- **Fare boxes** cost many thousands of dollars each. They break during service, must be repaired and meanwhile generate no fares. Repair people have to be trained and spend time maintaining the

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NO HIKES: Fare hikes should be last resort

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supposed to have, when the system isn't working for us, we start to make noise. We start to push back. We start to organize, and when we do this effectively, things start to change.

So here's the good news: after several years of pressure from the Transit Riders Union and many other organizations, this March 1st King County Metro will be rolling out a new \$1.50 reduced fare ORCA for riders with incomes below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. And Sound Transit is following suit, with the same reduced fare on Link Light Rail – and the same \$0.25 fare increase for everyone else.

Victory is sweet, right? So, why worry about the fare increase? As long as low income riders are getting a break, why not raise fares for riders who can afford it? Seattle is booming, with a seemingly endless influx of tech workers and other well-paid commuters whose pocketbooks will barely feel the difference. Metro needs the money, and a great public transit system is worth so much – if another quarter or two per ride can get us there, who are we to complain?

Not so fast. There's more to fare hikes than meet the eye. Here are some reasons to push back.

When you raise fares, people ride the bus less. That's a fact. A fare increase of 10% (e.g. from \$2.50 to \$2.75 for the peak fare) generally results in a ridership reduction of approximately 3.5%. This will be higher for seniors, youth, and riders with disabilities, for whom \$0.25 represents a larger percentage increase. So what will these people do, when they don't take the bus? Some will get in a car – bad for the environment! Some will walk or bike – good for them. But many can't walk or bike, and if

they can't rely on friends or family to get them where they need to go, they might just stay home, and their mobility and quality of life will suffer for it. And some will end up trying to walk or drive when they should not, when it is downright dangerous.

Climate change. Climate change. Climate change. Do I need to say it again? Climate change! It's happening, fast, we need to stop it, and one of the most effective steps we can take is to encourage public transit ridership. How does this translate to fare policy? Easy. Keep transit fares as low as possible, for everyone. In fact, make public transit like public sidewalks: FREE. Think this is a crazy idea? It's not. (See elsewhere in this issue!)

Not everyone who isn't "low income" is doing well financially. Let's say you're a single individual making \$24,000 per year, a little over twice the conventional "low income" threshold. First of

all, forget about a one bedroom apartment – at around \$1,400 per month, you'd be left with just \$600 for food, health care, transportation and everything else. So let's say you're willing to cram yourself and your worldly possessions into a studio apartment, all for the perks of urban living. You're still likely to pay half your income in rent. With just \$1,000 per month for everything else, and no food stamps (you're not "low income," remember?), \$2.50 or \$2.75 per bus ride is going to be rather steep. In this economy, a fare increase hurts middle income Seattleites too.

Thanks for the low income fare, but... let's keep things in perspective. Until 2008 the standard fare was \$1.25. Life for low income Americans hasn't exactly been a joy ride of prosperity since then, so while bringing our fares back down to \$1.50 is nice, we're not quite swooning with gratitude. Also consider that for low income seniors and people with disabilities

who rely on public transit, a \$0.25 fare increase from \$0.75 to \$1.00 represents a 33% increase in transportation costs.

Ultimately, all this boils down to a simple idea. Public transit is a public good, not a business. It should be treated as basic infrastructure, and it should be amply and publicly funded.

Yes, those who can easily afford to pay should pay for public transit – but this should be done through progressive taxes, not user fees like fares. And most important, the tax base should include not only high-income individuals but also the many multi-million and billion dollar corporations that reside in Seattle and King County, all of which profit immensely from having a great transit system (well, as great as it is, which isn't nearly as great as it could be) and other public amenities.

We're back to the good old progressive or socialist (take your pick) mantra: tax corporations and the rich! And it's true, that's what we need to do.

If you tell this to most local politicians, they'll at least pretend to agree with you, in principle. But then they'll object that it's not as easy as it sounds. In one way they're right: our state's legislature in Olympia hamstringed county and city governments, severely limiting local taxing options. Big chang-

es at the state level are needed to overhaul our tax system, and that's going to take some serious organizing to generate some serious people-power. But in another way, this is just an excuse. King County, the City of Seattle, and Sound Transit's multi-county transportation benefit district all have the power to levy an Employee Hours Tax on business to fund public transit – the city council can even do this without a public vote. It's not nearly enough, of course, but at least this would prove they're serious about progressive taxation. Yes, the Chamber of Commerce will whine. But what are our elected representatives for, if not to defend and pursue our interests against moneyed interests?

Okay, so maybe most local politicians are not ready to take on big business for real. What can they do, easily and painlessly? They can at least agree to some basics about fare policy moving forward. Let's spell it out for them. Fare increases should be a last resort. Public transit should be made as affordable as possible for everyone. As far as possible, public transit should be funded like basic infrastructure (through taxes), not like a business (through user fees, i.e. fares). The taxes that fund public transit and other public goods should be progressive, not regressive. Is that so hard?

DOWN WITH FARES: Fare collection too costly

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fare boxes. There is never a week when I do not have farebox troubles.

- **Cash.** Keeping track of the fares is costly. The money has to be secured, counted and transported to the bank.

- **ORCA passes** require physical rooms for sales agents, space for customers to stand in line, and machinery and software to handle transactions. Online sales have programming and maintenance costs.

- **King County Sheriffs.** Over 90% of operator assaults are fare related and 2000+ assaults occur yearly. This generates a huge amount of costly paperwork, not to mention the budget of the Sheriffs' unit assigned to Metro, not to mention stress on operators. Obviously assaults would decline enormously if fares were abolished. Everyone's

ride would be more pleasant and safer.

- **Transfers** have to be printed, kept track of, and transported to the bases daily. There is a significant black market in stolen transfers

Fare Evasion Is Inherently Unenforceable

No method exists or has been suggested to collect 100% of the fares that does not cost more than the recovered money. Punishment is insanely expensive since a veritable army of judges, prosecutors, defenders, clerks, etc., must be mobilized to prosecute even the most trivial offense, as anyone who has sat on a jury knows. It's just not worth it. Metro estimated after a survey that fare evasion losses were in the range of \$2M per year. That's about 0.2% of Metro's ~\$1B yearly budget. Any other business

would consider this level of shrinkage a Godsend and close the book. Abolishing fares would of course put an end to this nonsense.

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FARELESS CHAMPS: Fare free can work

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country and culture, we do have a short history of what happens in the United States. In the 1970s and 1990s two larger urban transit systems in Denver, Colorado and Austin, Texas did indeed go fare-free for a while. Many smaller resort and college towns have also adopted fare-free transit, including Corvallis, Oregon and Indian River County, Florida. As expected, ridership increased dramatically, by 20-60%, as riders flocked to use the service. Expenses in the form of new drivers and buses to keep up with ridership increase too, but the subsidy per rider always drops dramatically and the overall effectiveness of public transit is enhanced. While the experiments in Denver and Austin ended, the results, coupled with the fare-free systems in college and resort towns show that, if done correctly, fare-free transit could be an incredibly popular and useful public service.

But this is Seattle, you say, and that's Tallinn. It could never happen here. But how did it happen there? Tallinn's transit system, like King County Metro, was already heavily subsidized by taxes, and at a similar rate, around 75-80%. Eliminating the fare was roughly revenue neutral, as the elimination of fare enforcement and collection costs, coupled with the increase in tax revenue due to increased

spending power enabled by riders' reduction in daily commuting costs made up for the loss in fare revenue. So, while some new funding would be needed to make the transition in Seattle, ultimately it wouldn't break the bank.

What changes and benefits has the switch to a fare-free system brought to Tallinn? Increased ridership, as expected. There have been especially impressive increases in Lasnamäe, a dense neighborhood of working class immigrants, which, even by the most conservative estimates has seen ridership increase by 10%. Additionally, traffic volumes at the biggest and busiest intersections in the city are down by 14% from before the transit system went free.

We already subsidize our transportation systems; according to the Victoria Transport Policy Institute it's to the tune of about \$5 per ride. We already subsidize car owners, to the cost of about \$3700 a year per driver. Why shouldn't we consider our public transit systems an indispensable public good? Implementing a thoughtful, well-planned fare-free transit system would help riders, citizens, and businesses. It would help the environment and reduce congestion on our roads. It may seem like a crazy, impossible dream, but it's not. How about we at least start the conversation?

The **Transit Reader** is a publication of the Transit Riders Union, an independent democratic all-volunteer member-run union. If you are interested in contributing to future issues, contact us.

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Transit Riders Union Wants YOU!

Do you ride the bus? Then you're a transit rider, and you belong in the Transit Riders Union. TRU is a democratic member-run union that YOU can join: we are fighting to for better public transit for all. We have power in numbers. Join us today at www.transitriders.org or leave a message at 206-651-4282 and we'll get back to you.

Ask a Bus Driver

By Sam Smith

Hello Metro riders! My name is Sam Smith, and I've been a Metro driver since early 2013. I hear all sorts of questions from passengers, friends, and fellow TRU members on a range of topics related to my job. This column is dedicated to answering some of those questions. Anything you want to know – Why do the poles come off the wires so often? Where do you pick up the bus? – just ask! Send questions to sam@transitriders.org.

Dear Bus Driver Sam,
I've heard rumors that Metro drivers go to the bathroom in cups and bottles. Is that true?
- Randy, Central District

Thanks for submitting the very first question to this column, Randy! I'm so glad you asked, because I love talking about bathroom breaks for bus drivers. It's perhaps the most challenging logistical aspect of the job. I could go on a lengthy rant about the difficult labor conditions that recently resulted in Metro being fined by Labor & Industries, but before I jump into the bad and the ugly, allow me to brag about some of the things I love about bus driver bathrooms.

The Good

When I was first hired, I was outfitted with the usual items you may suspect: a collection of uniforms, employee handbook, county ID badge, etc. What stood out most to me was a fairly standard-looking metal house key. At this point, having been through a month of training, I already knew that this key served no purpose in starting a bus engine or entering the Metro base, so what was it for?

"It's your T-key. T as in Toilet."

Aha! Metro had just handed me access to secret bathrooms all over the county. These bathrooms, or "Comfort Stations" as they're known, are generally located at Transit Centers or in small, stand-alone structures at the ends of routes. In our route books, which display maps and driving directions for each route in the system, there is a list of comfort stations accessible along the route. Ideally, there would be one of these at the end of every route. Where there's not a Metro facility, Metro instead may have arranged with a local business or church to allow us to access their employee or customer bathroom. For example, at the end of Route 2 in Madrona Park, there is a Metro comfort station built right alongside the lake, but at the end of the 14 in Mt. Baker where there is no Metro structure, my T-key unlocks the front door of a church about one block away.

When the system works, it works great. I love my secret bathroom key. I have definitely taken advantage of it on my off time as well. During a long bike trip last summer through rural east King County, nature called as I was near the Woodinville Park & Ride, so I strolled on over to the comfort stations, and, after first determining an on-duty operator wasn't in need, I took care of business and was on my way!

The Bad

So in a fantasy world, there's always a comfort station at the end of every line, accessible 24/7. But as you may have guessed, we're far from this fairly reasonable scenario. Oftentimes our schedules are so tight and unrealistic that we don't have time to pee. For instance, the *scheduled* time between ending one trip and turning around to start the next, referred to as "recovery time", in my experience has been as little as five minutes. (To be fair, I once had a schedule with recovery time of 40 minutes, but in my experience, less than ten minutes is the norm.) So if I am running more than five minutes behind schedule, that means I'm already late before I even start my next trip! And guess what, our schedules are so Pollyanna that they don't really take into account things like traffic, loading and unloading passengers, stop signs, speed limits, etc. So if I'm already running late and I have to pee, what should I do? Run out and use the comfort station, further stranding all my future passengers (and further compounding my lateness), or do I hold it and try to catch up on my schedule? Neither one is a good option.

This is can be worse depending on the length of our next trip. As you're probably well aware, Metro loves its through-routing, that is, inbound routes that travel through Downtown Seattle and come out the other end as another outbound route. Routes C & D are linked in this way, as are the 5 & 21, the 24 & 124 and several others. There are many ways in which this makes sense: Metro doesn't need to find as many layover parking spots Downtown and it allows easier transfers for some passengers. However, buses traveling a farther distance are more likely to run behind schedule, so one passenger's easier transfer is several other riders'

Metro Fare



Metro Fare is a weekly comic based on local bus stories. Got a funny Metro experience you'd like to share? Visit metrofarecomic.com to send it in for a 'toon up.'

Tukwila Bus Poem

The east African lady, climbs aboard, all gold and scarves, and says,
"It is a good day. I am finally an American citizen." she is glowing,
and i feel 20 different things, mostly cynicism. i have rarely missed a
meal, except when i invested all my money on beer. and that time i
lived off of a jar of mayonnaise and a loaf of white bread after being
in a hurricane. i probably will never know what she has been through
because time is short and most of the people i see escape deep into
the past quickly. I am glad for her "Good for you!"

- G. Virgil Snapperfritzen

very late transfer. For drivers, this means driving essentially twice as far without an opportunity for a pee break. This past summer, when I drove the 24 & 124, that meant driving on local roads from Tukwila International Blvd Station through Georgetown, Airport Way, slogging through Downtown during rush hour and peak tourist season, Seattle Center, the Magnolia Bridge, and wiggling up and down Magnolia until finally reaching Discovery Park about two hours later. And again, this was in the summer, in a non-air conditioned coach, so I was drinking lots of water to stay hydrated and healthy.

Beyond unrealistic schedules and recovery times, for routes whose comfort stations are inside of local businesses, say the Route 26 which terminates near a Starbucks in Green Lake, those bathrooms aren't of much use when that business is closed. And given that many routes operate later than midnight, this puts many drivers in a bind.

I should mention at this point that Metro recognizes this as a problem, and at least in the interest of covering their own legal butts, have language permitting us to use a bathroom whenever and wherever we need it, be it at the end of the line with plenty of recovery time, or mid-route with a packed-to-capacity passenger load. So while it is somewhat comforting to know that I won't get fired for temporarily abandoning a bus filled with dozens of riders, it is just about the last thing any of us wants to do. That being said, I've done it before, and in the very serious interest of staving off bladder infections, I've learned that sometimes I have to put myself before getting my riders to their destinations more punctually, even though I hate the thought of it!

The Ugly

I'll conclude with a couple of personal anecdotes, which while ugly at the time, are pretty funny in retrospect. Randy, if you've made it this far, I'll finally answer your question. My first week on the job, I had a layover Downtown and needed to pee. I found another Metro operator laying over down the block and asked him where the official comfort station was. After looking suspiciously over his shoulders to make sure no one else was listening, he confided to me, in a whisper, that I should just pee in a bottle in the backseat, assuring me that as long as I'm not visible to the street, I won't get in trouble. "And what if I don't want to pee in a bottle?" He pointed to a coffee shop a couple of blocks away. Yikes, I thought to myself. Remind me not to turn into that dude.

Well... One early morning, after finishing service outside a school near Shoreline, and after a 16oz coffee had run its course through my system, I considered stopping at the school's bathroom, but there wasn't a particularly convenience place for me to park the coach without significantly inconveniencing other buses and cars. So I decided I could hold it for the 20 minute drive on the freeway back to the Metro base in SoDo, where I could drop off the bus, use the base restroom, and go home. On this particular day, traffic was completely stopped, and I was stranded for over an hour on the freeway. I grew increasingly desperate, and after rejecting several worse ideas that popped in my head, I ultimately grabbed the now-empty 16oz cup from my trash bin, set the emergency break, ran to the articulated (accordion) middle section, knelt down very low so as to be out of sight of my neighbors, stuck in adjacent lanes, and had one of the most relieving urinations of my life. This is when I learned that drinking 16 ounces of coffee can somehow generate more than 16 ounces of urine. I had to halt midstream, awkwardly run to the front of the bus with a full cup, open the door, empty, and repeat.

Fortunately, the bus was empty. Several months later, another day of terrible rush hour freeway traffic, but this time with a bus full of commuters! As traffic worsened, it slowly dawned on me that I wasn't going to make it to the end of the line. Then, even worse, I realized I wouldn't be able to make it to my first stop off the freeway. We've all experienced the discomfort of having to go really badly. It hadn't been since my childhood that my situation had worsened to the level beyond that. My mental faculties were slowly fading away, I was

sweating profusely, my palms clamming up, and twisting my legs as much as possible in a futile attempt to distract from the pain -- in other words, qualities you don't want in someone operating a 15-ton machine responsible for the safety of dozens of people. Again, I went through a series of bad options, including wetting my pants. I would have if I thought my clothes and the driver's seat would have absorbed everything, but out of fear that a noticeable puddle would have emerged on the floor, I opted out. Again, this is all occurring while we're essentially not moving on the freeway. Finally, I set the emergency break and opened the front door. I told the riders that I needed to check something under the front of the bus -- nothing alarming but since we're stopped I might as well check. I got into pushup position beneath a couple bikes on the front rack and let loose. I got back on the bus, no one batted an eye, and I went about my business as if I hadn't just peed underneath a bus on the freeway.

So Randy, in answer to your question, yes, we sometimes pee in cups and bottles. I carry an empty plastic bottle in my work bag, just in case. But I would happily never use it again.

Stop Veolia!

By Susan Koppelman

Did you know that our public Access bus service for folks with disabilities is actually provided by a private for-profit company from France? It may be amazing to believe, but one French multinational corporation is the largest privatizer of water services in the world and the largest privatizer of transportation services in North America. In King County, they have been operating transportation contracts since 1996, and yet few Seattle or US residents even know their name. The company is called Veolia, though this past summer it merged its transportation subsidiary with another company to form a new transportation company called Transdev. It operates 75% of transportation services for people with disabilities in King County. In 2008 Veolia caused a huge upset to the local labor community when it took over the contract that MV Transport had with King County, putting more Metro Access buses under Veolia operation. Whereas MV Transport was a union-represented subcontractor, Veolia has a horrendous track record of union-busting around the world. 140 MV Transport employees lost their jobs or took pay cuts. Amalgamated Transit Union Local 587 had just negotiated new contracts with MV Transport to increase the wage cap from \$19.90 to \$23 over the course of 4 years. Under Veolia, Metro Access drivers' wages have been capped at \$18 since 2008. The disability justice community has been very disappointed with Metro Access services under Veolia. Users of this service report being able to distinguish between Veolia drivers and other drivers in terms of the quality of service they receive. Palestine solidarity activists are drawing connections between the corporate occupation of our public services at home and the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Veolia is involved in enterprises that further entrench Israeli settler colonialism, including the operation of the Jerusalem

Light Rail which connects illegal Israeli settlements to Jerusalem, and the Tovlan Landfill in the occupied Jordan Valley where Veolia dumps the trash it collects from inside Israel into occupied Palestine against international law. Given their violations around the world, their history of corruption and track record of reducing services while increasing costs, how can we allow Veolia or Transdev to operate here in King County, turning our public investment into their private profit while our workers and services suffer? Local residents from disability justice, labor, anti-privatization, transit justice, environmental justice and Palestine solidarity communities are organizing under the banner Stop Veolia Seattle (SVS) "to connect global solidarity to local activism in ways that renew our energy, support our work, and nourish our activist communities." SVS would like to see all subcontracted work brought in house at King County Metro. The group aims to end the Veolia contract with King County and to prevent Veolia or Transdev from obtaining new contracts in the future. This may seem like a tall order, but hundreds of cities and groups around the world have succeeded in doing just this. Veolia has lost \$24 billion in contracts to date, because of its poor services and its profiteering from Palestinian human rights abuses. The Quakers and the Methodists have voted to divest from Veolia because of their involvement in the occupation of Palestine. In 2013, activists in St. Louis organized to get Veolia Water North America to withdraw itself from consideration of a contract with the city. In Boston school bus drivers are gaining support in resisting Veolia's dirty union-busting tactics. Last January Boston was victo-

rious in denying a new contract to Veolia to run the Massachusetts commuter rail. At least ten cities across England, Ireland and Wales have passed resolutions preventing Veolia from bidding on contracts or have excluded them from consideration of city contracts. Our local campaign has already had some big successes. In September, the MLK County Labor Council – representing 150 organizational members, and more than 75,000 working men and women who belong to Council-affiliated organizations – voted unanimously to pass a resolution urging King County to 1) end all contracts with French multinational corporation Veolia, 2) bring all bus services in house, and 3) preclude Veolia from bidding on any future contracts. The resolution was introduced by the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 587, which passed a similar resolution among their membership last April. Now it is time to get King County Council and Metro General Manager Kevin Desmond to act. Find out more about how you can be involved with the local Stop Veolia Seattle campaign and track our success at www.stopveoliaseattle.wordpress.com or contact us at StopVeoliaSeattle@gmail.com

**** Join TRU! ****

We, the members of the Transit Riders Union, are the Union. We discuss and make decisions democratically at our monthly meetings, we do the work, and together we fund and run our own independent union. We have sliding scale membership dues. Members pay \$20, \$10, \$5, or \$1 per month, and everyone has a voice and a vote. We are not a charity and we do not rely on money from corporations, foundations, or government agencies: we are transit riders organizing for public transit. Join online at www.transitriders.org/join-us, or phone us, at 206-651-4282, to request a paper application.

Destinations: Streissguth Gardens

Hidden Treasure on Capitol Hill
By Pauline Van Senus

Never heard of it? Neither had I until I ran into a copy of "In Love With a Hillside Garden" at the downtown Seattle Library. It's hard to believe that back in 1957 the area was a clearcut with just a few houses on 10th Ave E. The Streissguths met here and married, raising a son while creating gardens around their house. Later they acquired land south of the public stairs and started clearing paths along the now wooded hillside. Then they started planting and expanding what became a one-acre woodland garden. In 1996 the garden (together with undeveloped land north of St. Mark's Cathedral) became a city park. The family still lovingly maintains the gardens along with the help of volunteers. Plan to visit often as things change about every two weeks. The season starts early with yellow winter aconites in the dell and many thousands of lavender blue wild crocus.

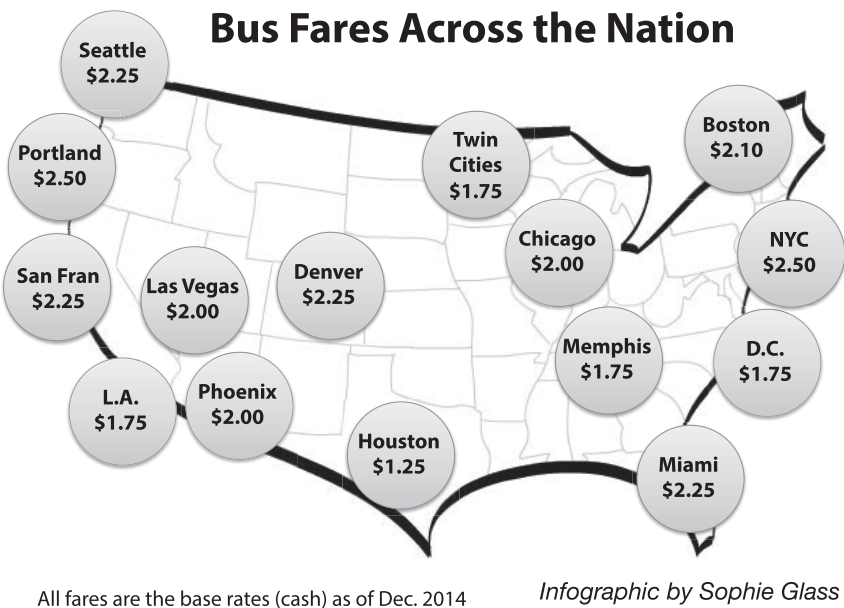


GET THERE: Metro Route 49. Southbound jump off at E. Newton, Northbound jump off at E. Howe. Walk south to Blaine St. Take the stairs to an airy view over Lake Union. The gardens are mostly south of the public stairs. Paths are narrow, so watch your step. Good shoes are recommended. You'll find brochures in the rock on the pocket lawn at the bottom of the main section of the stairs.
— Pauline Van Senus

A Matter of Public Health

By Corey Snelson

Seattle is currently experiencing exponential growth. It's no wonder – this city is fantastic. Public art, interesting people, many high-income employment opportunities, and a strong sense of social and economic justice appeal to a lot of people and make Seattle one of the most comfortable places to live. While growth is not necessarily bad, Seattle is proceeding at a rate that prohibits growth that is equitable across all economic and social groups - and worst of all - isn't smart. Smart Growth creates efficient transit options and a range of mixed-use housing choices that fit a variety of incomes and needs. Seattle is failing at Smart Growth. This is clearly demonstrated by the rate at which rent is increasing in the city while transit is continually threatened by cuts – we now have the fastest rising rent and among the most expensive cost per transit ride in the country. Our housing policies allow new luxury apartments and condos to take the place of housing that has historically been more affordable to low-income workers, the elderly, and the disabled, very often people of color – forcing them to move farther and farther away from the city in the pursuit of affordable, decent housing. Paired with cuts to public transit they find themselves isolated from their friends and family, far from their jobs, and stuck with increases in travel time and inconvenience. Public health practitioners who focus on the built envi-



ronment are concerned with all aspects of that environment – including housing, neighborhoods, and transportation – and how they influence the health of the people who live in them. This includes ways in which elements of the built environment may create acute illness, depression, or lead to unhealthy behaviors that may result in chronic illness or disease. Housing, and its location, quality, and proximity to areas of cultural significance, healthcare establishments, and other necessities of life is largely dependent upon a highly efficient transportation system. Without both a transportation

system AND affordable healthy housing, disease and illness result. This has been demonstrated time and time again through various studies throughout the US and Europe, yet lessons learned in other places are not being heeded here. Over the past several years, we've seen cuts to Metro transit and increases in fares that have isolated those that need access the most at the same time that they are being forced to move to more difficult locations because of decreasing housing affordability. These changes have been justified by citing long-standing rules that benefit wealthy developers on the backs of the poorest. The city is losing affordable housing at an alarming rate and our transit system is drastically underfunded. Unless something changes, and soon, the band-aid solutions the city has so far implemented will not be able to support the influx of new residents. If the city continues to allow unchecked growth that doesn't replace affordable decent housing, the city, county and entire region MUST allocate more funding to expand public transportation. For a city that is very proud of its cultural diversity, the time has come to seriously investigate how we allocate funds to benefit the common good of ALL residents, not just the wealthiest. Public health demands it, and so do the people.

Corey Snelson is Board Chair of the Tenants Union of Washington State and a Public Health Student at University of Washington.