



The Transit Reader

The Official Newsletter of the Transit Riders Union

www.transitriders.org

Volume 3, Issue 2 • Fall 2015

Let's Win Free ORCA Passes for All Public School Students!

On July 31, public school students from Rainier Beach High School and other schools in Seattle

marched from Seattle Public Schools Headquarters to City Hall to draw attention to the transportation challenges they face and to call for free ORCA passes for all public school students.

Currently, only high school students who live more than 2.5 miles from their school are eligible for a free ORCA pass subsidized by the school district. The distance cut-off for middle schoolers is 2.0 miles. Not only is five or more miles (the distance is measured "as the crow flies") a long way to walk to and from school, often there is no safe route to

Continued as FREE FOR STUDENTS page 7



Endorsements: Vote by November 3rd

Elect the most progressive city council EVER in 2015!

This fall, all nine seats on the Seattle City Council are up for election. With the debut of Seattle's new district system, everyone will get to vote for three councilmembers: one to represent their district (1 through 7), and two to fill the city-wide positions (8 and 9).

We have a chance to elect a kick-ass city council this fall – the most progressive, diverse, responsive city council Seattle has ever seen, in fact. But the stakes are high. Four of the candidates TRU has endorsed are facing off against strong opponents

whose campaigns are being bankrolled by lobby groups representing big corporations, developers,

Continued as ENDORSEMENTS on page 4

- ☒ YES on Move Seattle
- ☒ Lisa Herbold for District 1
- ☒ Kshama Sawant for District 3
- ☒ Michael Maddux for District 4
- ☒ Mike O'Brien for District 6
- ☒ Jon Grant for Position 8

Transit Riders Delegation

See page 3 for TRU's Affordable Transit Goals



On April 22, King County Councilmembers Larry Gossett, Rod Dembowski and Joe McDermott listen as members of a Transit Riders Delegation testify to the need for lower fares to make public transit affordable for all. (Photo courtesy of the Metropolitan King County Council)

Open Letter to Jeff Bezos: Seattle transit could use Amazon's help

By Katie Wilson

Originally published on Crosscut.com

Dear Mr. Bezos:

Seattle is changing. Fast. And Amazon, which according to some estimates could employ 70,000 in our city by 2019, is indisputably a major driver of that change. But where exactly are we headed? And what will life in our city be like when we get there?

These are questions more and more Seattleites are starting to care about, especially those of us who don't bring in six-figure – or even five-figure – incomes. And these are questions Amazon has good reason to care about too, since what happens to our city and the people who live here will determine the sustainability of Amazon's growth.

I think a lot about the future of our city through my work with the Transit Riders Union, an independent, democratic member-run union organizing to improve public transit in our region. Seattle is rapidly becoming a world-class city, and we urgently need a world-class transit system. But our transit infrastructure and service are struggling to keep up with growing ridership.

The problem is, the way we fund public transit in Washington State doesn't work. Budget shortfalls have been a constant refrain for years, and transit riders have been forced to pick up the tab – King County Metro fares have doubled since 2008 and are now among the highest in the nation. With

the passage of Seattle's Proposition 1 last November, Metro is adding bus service for the first time in years, but the new funding is hardly ideal: the city is going through costly and embarrassing contortions to make \$60 car tab fees less burdensome to low-income car owners, while the 0.1% sales tax increase has deepened Metro's dependence on this volatile revenue source, leaving us just one economic downturn away from another crisis.

This fall Seattle voters will be asked to approve the \$930 million Move Seattle levy to fund long overdue transportation projects, from transit infrastructure to bike lanes and sidewalks to road and bridge repair. With luck it will pass – but legitimate concerns have been raised about a property tax increase of this size. In 2016, if the State Legislature can get its act together in time, we're also likely to see a ballot measure for Sound Transit 3, to extend our regional light rail system to the tune of up to \$15 billion from – you guessed it – some combination of sales tax, property tax, and Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET).

What is conspicuously absent from this funding picture is any significant contribution from big employers like Amazon. Along with every other major employer in our region, Amazon depends heavily on our taxpayer-subsidized transit system. Buses and trains carry Amazon workers to work and

Continued as DEAR JEFF page 2

We Won a Low Income Fare!



The Transit Riders Union fought for a low-income fare, and we won! As of March 1, King County Metro and Link Light Rail offer a reduced fare of \$1.50 for low-income riders. Check the chart to see if you qualify for an ORCA LIFT card.

Call (206) 553-3000 or (800) 756-5437 or visit www.orcalift.com for information on enrollment locations and ways you can verify your income.

| Size of Household | 200% Federal Poverty Level |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | \$23,540 |
| 2 | \$31,860 |
| 3 | \$40,180 |
| 4 | \$48,500 |
| 5 | \$56,820 |
| 6 | \$65,140 |



DEAR JEFF: Will Amazon step up?

Continued from page 1

ease congestion so that all those Amazon Prime deliveries can be rushed posthaste to customers' doors. Amazon's explosive growth is placing new demands on our transportation system that will require significant public investment and ongoing expenditure of public resources. We are all subsidizing Amazon's success.

That's not to say that Amazon has done nothing. Amazon funds some service on the South Lake Union Streetcar that loops around its campus, and buys ORCA passes for employees rather than sequestering them in a private bus fleet à la Microsoft. And, perhaps recognizing that threatened bus cuts would spell disaster for its commuters, Amazon gave \$25,000 to the unsuccessful campaign to pass King County's Proposition 1 in April 2014.

Such gestures are welcome, but they are not commensurate with the need, or with Amazon's outsized impact on our region.

Amazon's growth is profoundly shaping our city and our quality of life. By bringing many thousands of high-paid tech workers to our region, Amazon is contributing to rapidly rising rents and costs of living. A full-time worker in King County must now earn over \$27 per hour to afford a market-rate 2-bedroom apartment. For low- and middle-income households, too often this means displacement. At the very least it means less money left over for transportation expenses such as bus fare or gas money, compromising our mobility and narrowing our opportunities.

Amazon's planned development in Block 21 of the Denny Triangle neighborhood, for which they are requesting to privatize a public alley, includes underground parking for 835 vehicles. Traffic congestion in this area is already terrible, and Seattle has the fourth worst traffic in the country. We simply cannot

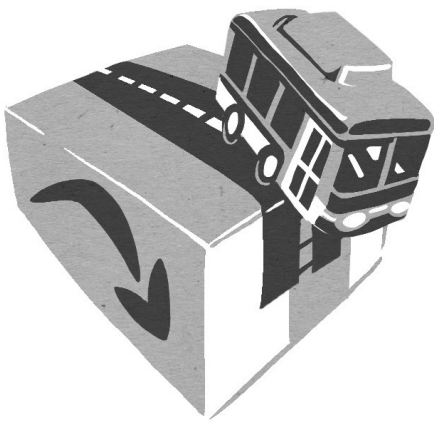
continue to cram thousands more cars onto our roads. We don't just need more public transit, we need a lot more, and fast.

These are problems Amazon and other big employers should care about, and not only as a matter of social justice. Ultimately, rising inequality in our city does not bode well for Amazon's future. Amazon needs low-wage janitors, security guards and restaurant workers to be able to live near enough to commute to its campus. And gridlock simply hurts the bottom line.

So, what's the answer? Until our state's notorious tax system gets the overhaul it desperately needs (and next time, Mr. Bezos, we'd appreciate it if you didn't actively oppose this effort!), it's up to local governments to step up and do what they can. Portland's TriMet and New York City's MTA are funded partly by a tax on employers, based on their gross payroll. Here in Seattle, the city could pass an Employee Hours Tax on businesses to help fund public transit. Amazon's public support for such a measure would be a great boon.

But Amazon could do so much more. Amazon has an opportunity

to set an example here in Seattle, to show how a major corporation can give back to the community that sustains it. How about making



an annual contribution to Metro's operations, putting more buses on the roads and challenging other big employers to step up and do their part too?

Or, how about taking a page out of Google's book? We recently learned that in San Francisco, Google is covering the costs of free transit pass programs for low- and moderate-income youth, seniors and people with disabilities. This action is a welcome acknowledgment of the growing impact of

their company on the surrounding community and the transportation system in particular.

Amazon could make a similar gesture here in Seattle. On March 1st of this year, King County Metro implemented the new ORCA Lift low-income fare. This program is a welcome relief for thousands of cost-burdened transit riders. But on that same day, Metro raised fares for everyone else, including low-income youth, seniors and people with disabilities. Access Paratransit riders took the worst hit, with a fare increase of \$0.50 per ride or \$17 per month. Apparently, Metro couldn't keep all the buses on the road without nickel-and-diming the most vulnerable members of our community.

How about covering the costs of the ORCA Lift program? This is one simple way Amazon can contribute to the public transit system they depend on, while helping to ensure mobility for the low-wage workers who must commute to work in the South Lake Union and Denny Triangle neighborhoods. And it would free up money in Metro's budget to expand service and lower fares for all riders.

Last month, I read that your private space flight company Blue Origin had recently launched its first test flight. While you're pursuing the goal of "making space-flight more affordable and accessible", how about helping to ensure that all of us here on the ground in Amazon's home city can afford the most basic kind of mobility, the freedom to get around our city by bus? And how about helping to expand our public transit system and cut greenhouse emissions, so that your future space tourists have a habitable Earth to come back to?

Ultimately, Amazon's responsibility to be a good neighbor extends further than building amenities on and around their corporate campus. Amazon has a responsibility to the workers they and their sub-contractors employ, and to the wider community that is impacted by their growth. I hope you'll consider these ways of giving back, setting an example that other big corporations and institutions can emulate, and making Amazon a neighbor that our city can be proud of.

Katie Wilson is general secretary of the Transit Riders Union

The History of the Transit Riders Union

By Scott Myers

The origin of the Seattle Transit Riders Union dates back to the summer of 2011. Three years into the Great Recession, King County Metro faced a budget crisis due to declining sales tax revenue. Plans to deeply cut bus service caused a public outcry, and a small group of transit riders who would later found TRU got active in the fight to save our bus service.

The King County Council responded to public pressure by voting to stave off bus cuts with a \$20 car tab fee. Our bus system was safe for the time being, but we knew the car tab fee was a temporary measure. We also weren't satisfied with further taxing working and poor people like ourselves. Moreover, with the ecological catastrophe looming, we knew it was imperative not merely to hold back transit cuts, but to push to massively expand public transit in order to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. We saw the need to found a permanent organization to carry on the struggle.

We asked ourselves, "Why can't the politicians – who supposedly represent us – come up with a better solution than giving us the ultimatum – accept cuts to service or a hit to your income?" So we did some studying. It turns out these kinds of cuts are not just the product of the recent recession. Over the past four decades, globalization has decimated the number of decent jobs available to us and replaced them with temporary, low-paid and part-time ones. What we lost in wages the financial elite sought to replace with easy consumer credit, thereby consigning increasing numbers of us to debt slavery. In order to further swell their own profit streams, the ruling class proceeded to starve, eviscerate and privatize our social services, and increasingly push the tax burden onto the backs of working and poor people.

The result of this onslaught has been that the old "middle class" of decently paid workers is disappearing, giving way to a growing class of unemployed, underemployed and underpaid people, living in a state of precarity with no idea what the future holds. From this perspective, the recent transit crisis made perfect sense to us. It is not just an isolated problem, but one small piece of this decades-long attack on our standard of living.

Are we are helpless to stop this? We don't think so. As corporations concentrate more and more of society's wealth, they have found the power to put increasing pressure on governments and populations in order to get what they want – at the expense of everyone else. Well, they may have the wealth, but we have the numbers. We are many, they are few... and we live here. To counterbalance the pressure that government gets from above, we have to put pressure from below. And to do that, we have to get organized.

So with these considerations in mind, in fall of 2011 a small group of us drew up a mission statement and ten principles, and founded the Seattle Transit Riders Union.

A Union of Transit Riders?

We looked back at history for examples of working and poor people successfully organizing and improving their lot, and we saw undeniable similarities between our time and the 1930s, the Great Depression. Inequality of wealth was at its highest, and conditions of life for working and poor people had become intolerable. So what did they do about it? They formed unions. And in a few short years, they ushered in a radically new era in American history.

The union movement revolutionized the relationship between employer and employee, winning vastly improved working conditions and living wages. But victories were won

not limited to the economic sphere. President Roosevelt saw the writing and wall and responded politically with his New Deal which included revolutionary new programs that we take for granted now like unemployment insurance, the minimum wage, and social security. (Roosevelt was hated by the employing class for this. But the pressure he felt from the workers held him in check.)

The TRU attitude is: we did it before, we can do it again. But a lot has changed since the 1930s. (For instance, most of us don't work in factories anymore – or live on farms.) We have to figure out how to get organized in the 21st Century. This is what the Transit Riders Union is all about: developing a new model for organizing working and poor people to fight for our interests, and put people in power who represent us. What have we done so far to accomplish this?

People Power, Not Money Power

In 2012, when we were still a very small organization, we gathered thousands of signatures to protest the closure of the Ride Free Area in Downtown Seattle. On the heels of that campaign, we began to put pressure on the county to adopt a reduced fare for low-income riders. In 2014, we won! The ORCA LIFT program began this past March.

In 2014 we threw our weight behind the fight for a \$15 minimum wage, and we campaigned to save and expand bus service.

This year we assembled a delegation of over 100 transit riders that met with County and City Councilmembers to present our vision of an affordable, reliable, and equitable world-class public transit system. Now we are also campaigning in the elections for Seattle City Council, supporting candidates who support our goals and will fight for our interests.

Not bad for a young organization – not of trained professionals – but of,

by and for poor and working people, running on volunteer labor. In a few short years, we've built up the skills and know-how to do things our own way. Financially, TRU is supported by our own member dues, and some individual donations. This makes us independent, not tied to any foundation, labor union or political party. We are democratic and our leaders are elected and accountable to members, who exercise the final say in all matters at our monthly meetings.

A Movement of Poor and Working People to Change the World

In order to win the world-class transit system that Seattle needs – not to mention solving all the other problems that we face in this day and age – it is clear that an organization of transit riders, no matter how large, is not sufficient. What is needed is a new mass movement of working and poor people that fights along all the lines that affect our lives: transit, housing, social services, healthcare, employment and workplace issues, and the environment.

But effective social movements don't just spring up out of nowhere. They start with effective organizations like the TRU. By successfully organizing transit riders, we set an example for and give encouragement to those who fight on other issues. We become their allies, and they become ours.

So, join with us to take the next step! We invite you to volunteer with us this fall, as we work to elect the most progressive City Council Seattle has ever seen. We are also campaigning for an Employee Hours Tax for transit, free ORCA passes for public school students, and reduced-fare passes for Seattle Colleges District students.

And, don't forget to become a member of the Transit Riders Union. Let's get organized and build a movement that can change the world!

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.

Website:

www.transitriders.org

Phone:

206-651-4282

Mailing Address:

Transit Riders Union
P.O. Box 20723
Seattle, WA 98102

Email:

contact@transitriders.org

Editors:

Beau Morton
Katie Wilson

Layout and Illustration:
Stevie VanBronkhorst

Illustration this page:
Carl Nelson

TRU's Affordable Transit Goals

Lower fares: When fares go up, people ride public transit less. The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) estimates that a 10% increase in fares leads to a 4% reduction in ridership. With climate change accelerating and gridlock already at unacceptable levels, we should be rewarding people for taking the bus, not making it more expensive.

Free transit for all public school students: Free bus passes for all students will mean fewer students truant or late for class. See page 7!

Affordable transit for college students: Many major transit agencies offer a reduced student fare. It just makes sense, with so many college students today racking up debt and struggling to balance academic classes with low-wage jobs. TRU joins Seattle Colleges District students in calling for reduced fare quarterly transit passes at the \$1.50 per ride, \$54 per month rate.

Free transit for low-income youth: For low-income families, riding the bus with children is a huge expense, especially now that King County Metro's youth fare rose from \$1.25 to \$1.50. San Francisco already has a free bus pass program for low and moderate-income youth. The Transit

Riders Union believes it's time for King County to do the same.

Free transit for low-income senior and disabled riders: On March 1st, 2015, San Francisco's Muni bus system introduced a free pass for low and moderate-income senior and disabled riders. On the same day, King County Metro raised transit costs for these riders by 33%. Since the discontinuation of the \$99 Annual Reduced Fare Metro pass in 2010, annual transit costs for senior and disabled riders have increased more than fourfold. For riders on a small fixed income, this is unacceptable. Let's do the right thing and let low-income seniors and people with disabilities ride for free.

Keep Access service affordable: While standard, youth, senior and disabled fares all went up twenty-five cents on March 1st, Access fares went up by fifty cents, from \$1.25 to \$1.75. Don't nickel and dime disabled riders!

Expand ORCA LIFT to all Sound Transit services: Currently only Link Light Rail offers a low-income reduced fare. We want the low-income fare to extend to all Sound Transit services, including buses.

Vote Yes to Move Seattle

By Beau Morton

The Bridging the Gap transportation levy that Seattle voters passed in 2009 is expiring at the end of the year. It was a levy of limited scope and size, like dipping our toe into the kind of large, city-wide multi-modal transportation projects that Seattle needs going forward to deal with strong growth and demographic changes.

We now have the opportunity to replace and expand on Bridging the Gap with The Transportation Levy to Move Seattle, usually shortened to "Move Seattle". While still short of the amount that the Seattle Department of Transportation says the city actually needs, it will provide \$930 million over nine years, through bonding and an increase in the property tax. The levy will cost the median homeowner \$275 a year, much of which is simply replacing the existing property tax from Bridging the Gap. When surveyed about transportation a majority of Seattleites consistently say that they want a safer city that doesn't require them to own a car. Move Seattle will go a long way to ensure that this will be a reality.

The levy will fund multi-modal projects all over the city from new sidewalks, bicycle infrastructure, and capital improvements that will allow Metro buses to run

smoother and faster, to bridge and road repair and replacement. Every district in the city will be the beneficiary of projects that will create a more connected, transit-friendly, bike-friendly and walkable Seattle.

During the City Council's discussions of the levy this spring, councilmembers Nick Licata and Kshama Sawant attempted to substitute an increase in the Commercial Parking Tax and an Employee Hours Tax for some of the property tax funding, a proposal that the Transit Riders Union was fully behind. However, despite the fact that this proposal was defeated in the council, TRU has voted to endorse the levy while continuing the fight for more varied and progressive funding in Seattle and beyond.

Increases in property and sales taxes can only be viable choices for so long. In addition to pushing for more progressive options, we have an opportunity now to make the property tax increases more palatable. We need to encourage state and local officials to:

- Provide property tax refunds for low-income home owners and renters.
- Look at the very nature of the property tax in Washington State. While it would require a change to the state constitution,

a graduated or varied-rate property tax would allow for a more equitable and flexible property tax system.

- Push for income and capital gains taxes.

Beyond that, it is imperative that we work to make Seattle affordable to all by providing an adequate amount of affordable housing so that all Seattleites, both current and future residents are able to benefit from the projects funded by the Move Seattle levy. Levies like Move Seattle, while imperative for smart, future-proof growth, do make cities more desirable places to live, which historically has meant that those who are not high earners have been forced to leave.

Even if Move Seattle is not everything the Transit Riders Union has hoped and dreamed for, and even though TRU does have reservations with the property tax we absolutely recommend voting YES on the Transportation Levy to Move Seattle in November's election; the setbacks caused by the levy losing would be too great. There is a lot of work to be done to ensure that we live in a Seattle that is equitable, safe and affordable to all; transportation is a major component of that, and the Move Seattle levy is a vital, necessary step.



A Transit Riders Delegation meets with Seattle City Councilmembers in May 2015, asking their support in making public transit affordable for all Seattle students, youth, seniors, and people with disabilities, and also advocating for a better late-night bus service network and an Employee Hours Tax to make our transit tax system more equitable. (Photo by Doug Nielson)

Delegate Testimony

I work at a small nonprofit social service agency; the most frequent form of assistance we provide is free bus tickets. ORCA LIFT does not help the homeless. Nor the people I see daily at work who are living on the most fixed and bare bones incomes: social security, child support, SSI, disability or veterans benefits, and unemployment insurance. Public transit should be FREE for low-income seniors and the disabled. I see people in their 70s, who are not in perfect health, trying to walk up Queen Anne hill to get to our office for one of our pre-packed grocery bags – in the rain!

– Lisa Barnes

When I heard the fares were being increased from \$27 a month to \$36, I was honestly scared and very upset. That meant my already tight

budget was getting tighter. I am a woman with a disability and live on SSDI, a fixed and very limited source of income. Being on SSDI means I am currently unable to work a full-time job, so I get just enough to survive on to pay for shelter, food, transportation and sometimes clothing. Nine dollars has sometimes meant the difference of me eating three times a day to maybe once. I really wish the very people who were hit the hardest by the fare hikes, people like me, are thought about when decisions like this are made.

– Lakeya Johnson

I am a 50-year-old disabled rider of King County Metro. I have been riding the bus since 1998 and I have seen many changes to the bus system over the last 17 years.

When I first started to ride the

bus the cost was under \$4 for the monthly reduced pass, twenty-five cents a ride, a day pass for 2-3 times the cost of a single ride, and riding in downtown Seattle was free. Now the reduced fare pass is \$36, a buck per ride, no day pass, and no more free zone in downtown Seattle.

Anyone on public assistance already has enough challenges to meet daily needs. Most folks need public transportation to reach food, doctors, medicine, child care, jobs, and schooling because they cannot afford private transportation, cannot walk, or are not in walking distance of these resources. Human dignity demands that compassion reaches all of us and public transportation must stay affordable to all that need it.

– Russell Heller

Buscopes!

By Yasmin Elbaradie



ARIES: You will sit across from a beautiful stranger aboard the 5 late at night who will gaze into your eyes and speak to you of the mystical significance of the number 777, how it explains every Seahawks victory to date and also the restraining order obtained against him/her.

TAURUS: This month will see you enjoying many blissful bus naps. My advice is to try not to miss your stop.

GEMINI: There is a good chance that you will meet your new best friend waiting in a bus shelter on a rainy night. Be open to the possibility by not obsessively FacePhoning whilst waiting for your bus to show up.

CANCER: The last month has seen you increasingly frustrated with your commute, so figure out how to make your travel time more pleasant. Try asking your coworkers for podcast recommendations (Radiolab? Democracy Now? Serial?), consider taking up a new portable hobby (knitting or crochet) or peruse the library for a good book.

LEO: If you're able, and it isn't raining too hard, disembark a few blocks before your usual stop and walk to your destination. This small amount of extra movement will give you a little boost.

VIRGO: You've been feeling down after your dungeon master decided he was going pro and moved to L.A. I have a strong feeling, Virgo, that his replacement might be aboard a Route 7 bus sometime this month. Prominently display your player's

handbook while on board to increase the odds of this happening.

LIBRA: One winter night, you will take the D line to downtown and, whilst immersed in Fifty Shades of Gray, miss the last stop and find yourself in West Seattle. Doh!

SCORPIO: Your type-A tendencies, Scorpio, mean that you routinely maximize the use of your time. You're used to firing off a few tweets, texting your mom, answering a few emails, and catching up on the latest in the Middle East, all in the first few minutes of any bus trip. Try slowing down. Take a deep breath, gaze out of the window, and let your mind drift off for a little while your capable Metro driver does the hard work of getting you to your destination.

SAGGITARIUS: On your way to meet your sweetheart for your 13th date anniversary, you will show up right on time for your bus but the OneBusAway app will tell you that it went by three minutes early.

CAPRICORN: An intoxicated stranger will ask you, on the 26 in the middle of the day, what a nice Jewish girl is doing in a place like this, whether or not you are nice, Jewish, and/or a girl.

AQUARIUS: This winter, make time to ride route 48 in its entirety, in either direction, ideally not during the evening rush hour unless you are feeling masochistic.

PISCES: When you least expect it, you will encounter your favorite bus driver, reassigned many moons to a route you do not normally ride, and he will once again ask the question of the day over the PA system.

The Transit Riders Union Endorsements for Seattle City Council

ENDORSEMENTS

Continued from page 1

landowners, realtors, and the chain restaurant and hotel industries that tried so hard to block our \$15 per hour minimum wage. If these money-backed candidates win, our city could have dark days ahead.

The Transit Riders Union has made endorsements in five of the nine city council races. How did we decide? We sent a questionnaire on public transit issues to all candidates, we reviewed incumbents' voting records and new candidates' histories of public engagement and activism, we consulted with ally organizations that work on issues such as housing, homelessness and workers' rights. We debated, and we voted. Affordable housing weighed large in our discussions. As transit riders, we want to see public transit expanded and improved. But what good is a world-class transit system if you can't afford to live near it, or your rent is so high you have to count quarters for bus fare? The housing crisis is a hugely important issue for all of us in Seattle.

So, here are our endorsements. The bottom line? This fall, we have an opportunity to elect the best city council ever. We can move our city forward, or we can let it slide backward. TRU will be fighting to elect our progressive slate. We know can do it – but we need your help.

Up through November 3, TRU members and volunteers will be hanging posters throughout the city, distributing flyers, and doing high-visibility outreach downtown (holding signs, etc.) to remind people to vote once ballots are mailed. Do you have an hour or two per week to volunteer with us? We'd love to have your help! Email contact@transitriders.org, or leave a message at 206-651-4282 and an organizer will get in touch.

Jon Grant for City-Wide Position 8

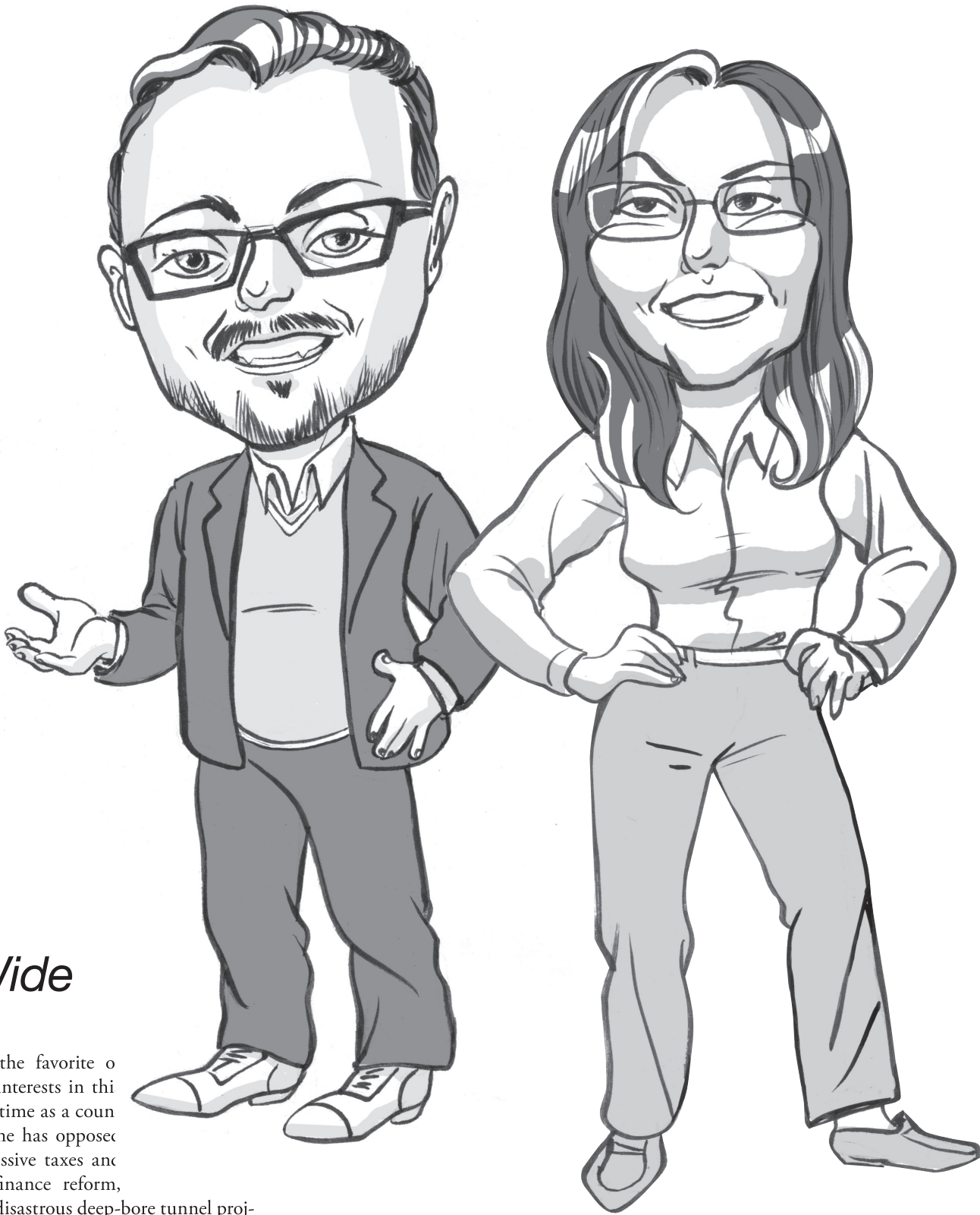
Every voter in Seattle can vote in this important race for city-wide council Position 8. Jon Grant has been a staunch advocate for affordable housing and tenants' rights as director of the Tenants Union of Washington State. As a councilmember he promises to champion policies that will help renters and prevent displacement, including developer linkage fees, tenant protections, rent control, and publicly-owned affordable housing. He supports progressive taxes to take the burden off low and middle-income households and require big landowners, corporations and the rich contribute to the common good too. And he'll be a strong, independent voice for police accountability and citizen oversight.

Incumbent and council president Tim

Burgess is the favorite of big money interests in this race. In his time as a councilmember he has opposed local progressive taxes and campaign finance reform, backed the disastrous deep-bore tunnel project, sponsored laws criminalizing homelessness and voted against funding for homeless encampments.

Jon Grant has pledged not to accept campaign contributions from real estate developers, and in the primary elections he got more votes per dollar of campaign money than any other candidate in any race. Despite a war chest more than five times the size, Burgess got less than 46% of the vote, a very vulnerable position for an incumbent.

It's no wonder – Jon Grant's message has struck a nerve. He is the underdog in this race, and with our support he can win. Vote Jon Grant!



Kshama Sawant for District 3

Seattle's favorite socialist deserves your vote. Kshama Sawant has fought tirelessly for the interests of working and poor people throughout her first term on the city council, and she has gotten results, from raising the minimum wage to increasing funding for homeless services and tent encampments. She has been a strong ally to the labor unions that represent many of our city's workers and to grassroots organizations like the Transit Riders Union. Kshama supported the effort to preserve and expand Metro bus service and, along with Councilmember Nick Licata, she has been leading a long overdue push for more progressive funding for public

transit.

The campaign of Kshama Sawant's opponent, Pamela Banks, is being bankrolled by a virtual Who's Who of big corporations, developer and landowner interests. It's no secret that they want Kshama out, and we can expect this race to get ugly. You'll hear Kshama's detractors accuse her of being divisive, shrill and unwilling to compromise. Don't believe a word of it. She's been courageous and effective throughout her first two years on the City Council, and we all need to pull together so we don't lose our city's most progressive councilmember. Re-elect Kshama Sawant!

Register to Vote

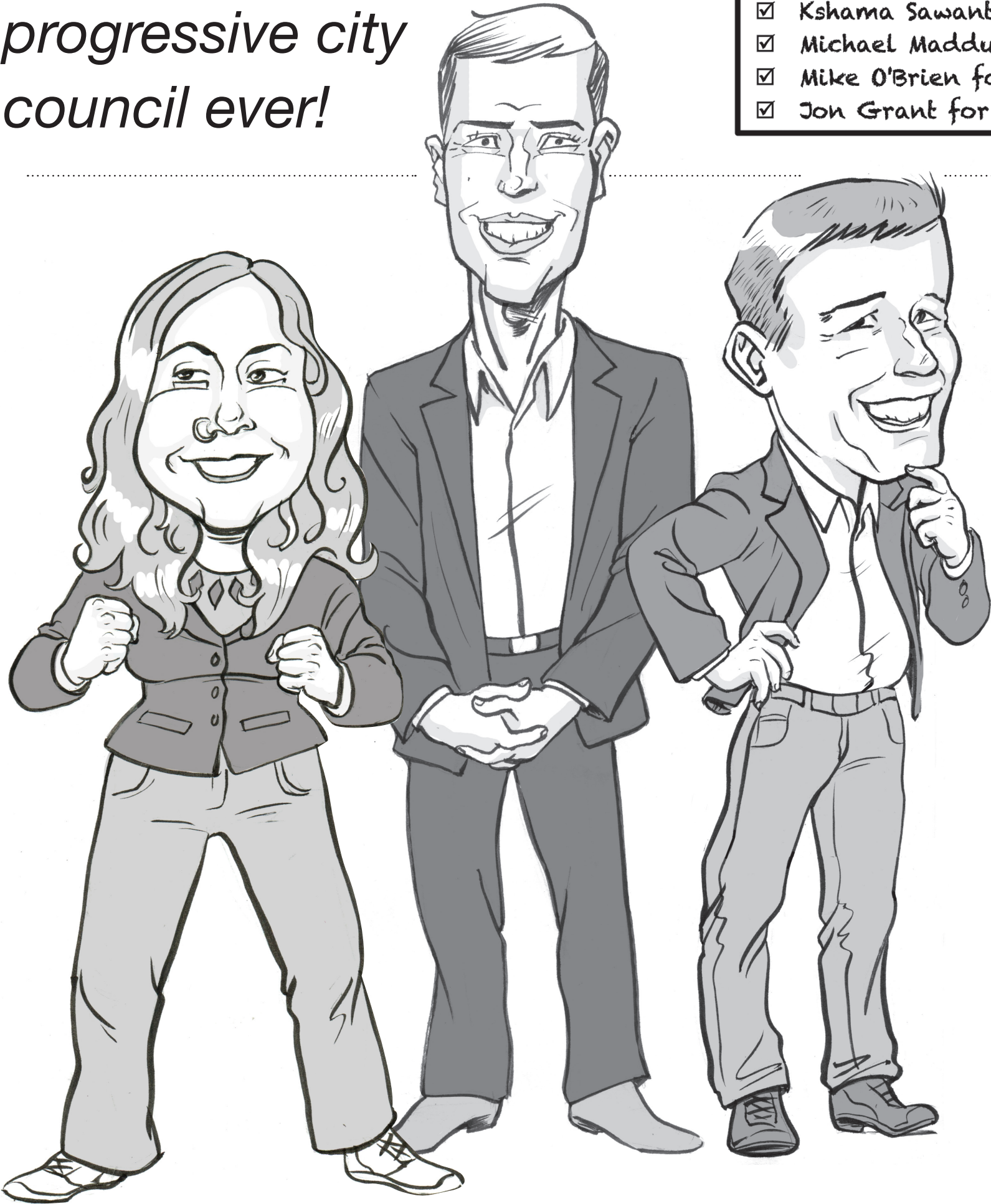
Register or update your registration online by
October 5th: kingcounty.gov/elections/register

Register in person until October 26th:

King County Voter Registration Annex
King County Administration Building, Room 440
500 4th Avenue in downtown Seattle

Questions? Call 206-296-8683

Vote by November 3rd for the most progressive city council ever!



Once again, it's:

- ✓ YES on Move Seattle
- ✓ Lisa Herbold for District 1
- ✓ Kshama Sawant for District 3
- ✓ Michael Maddux for District 4
- ✓ Mike O'Brien for District 6
- ✓ Jon Grant for Position 8

Mike O'Brien for District 6

Mike O'Brien has been a progressive voice on the Seattle City Council and a strong proponent of public transit since he was first elected in 2009. We are disappointed that he did not join Councilmembers Licata and Sawant in support of more progressive funding options for Seattle's Prop 1 and the Move Seattle levy, but we're counting on his promise of future support for an Employee Hours Tax for public transit. O'Brien did take the lead in dedicating city funding to improve transit access for low-income riders, he's been a leader on environmental issues and vocal opponent of the deep-bore tunnel, and overall he and his office have been consistently responsive to grassroots organizations like the Transit Riders Union. We look forward to working with Mike O'Brien in his next term on the Seattle City Council.

Michael Maddux for District 4

Lisa Herbold for District 1

For the past 17 years, Lisa Herbold has worked in City Hall as a legislative aide to Councilmember Nick Licata. With Licata's impending retirement the city council will lose a crucial progressive-left anchor. Lisa Herbold, with her deep experience and demonstrated commitment to progressive policy, is uniquely qualified to keep it from going adrift.

West Seattle's geography and history have created a unique set of transportation challenges. District 1 deserves more and better public transit, and we believe Lisa Herbold, who is a daily bus commuter herself, will deliver – while also leading on issues of affordable housing and homelessness, environmental protections and workers' rights.

The campaign of Lisa Herbold's opponent, Shannon Braddock, was bolstered in the primary elections by independent expenditures of nearly \$70,000 from big business, landlord and commercial real estate developer lobby groups. Moneyed interests know who is likely to be on their side, and who will go to bat for all the struggling denizens of this city. Lisa Herbold is running a people-powered campaign and she needs your support and your vote!

Michael Maddux is the only renter running for office this fall. In a city where over half of housing units are occupied by renters, where the average one-bedroom now costs more than \$1,500 and over a third of renters are paying more than a third of their income in rent, it's vital to have this perspective on our city council. Maddux is also a gay single dad, neighborhood activist and volunteer, parks advocate, and a strong progressive who promises to fight for working and poor people.

Michael Maddux's opponent, Rob Johnson, is Executive Director of Transportation Choices Coalition, and we appreciate his advocacy for public transit. However, Johnson's primary campaign benefitted from \$74,000 in independent expenditures from big business, landlord, and chain hotel & restaurant lobby groups. We're concerned that attempting to please these interests will

ultimately result in worse outcomes for public transit, not to mention affordable housing and a suite of other issues vital to cost-burdened Seattleites. To secure the future of our transit system, we need councilmembers who will fight hard for more a more progressive tax structure. We believe Maddux is the man for the job.

Before you vote this November, you should know...



Who is trying to buy the Seattle City Council?

Be an informed voter. Find out here:
www.RunForTheMoney.org

Seattle City Council Should Pass an Employee Hours Tax for Transit

By Katie Wilson

Seattle’s transportation infrastructure and transit service lag years behind our city’s rapid growth. You can feel it any time you try to get across town during rush hour, by car or by bus.

Move Seattle, the \$930 million property tax levy for transportation improvements that will appear on the November ballot, will help alleviate some of our transit woes, but there’s another progressive tax that Seattle should be taking advantage of—the Employee Hours Tax (EHT).

This flexible funding tool could generate \$20 to \$30 million per year, enough to make strides toward a true Bus Rapid Transit system in Seattle. The “head tax” is paid by employers based on number of employees, and requires businesses to contribute to the public transit system their workers depend on and help ease commerce-stifling congestion. With riders, consumers and car-owners already contributing through fares and taxes, an EHT will make our transit tax structure more equitable.

As our city councilmembers bemoan our state’s regressive tax system, why don’t they use one of the very few progressive options at their disposal? Every month we wait to pass a robust EHT, we lose millions of dollars in revenue that could be building the world-class transit system Seattle so desperately needs.

To understand why the city council hasn’t yet passed an EHT, we need to understand history.

Way back in 2006, when Move Seattle’s predecessor, Bridging the Gap, was approved by voters, the city council augmented it by passing a Commercial Parking Tax and an Employee Hours Tax. The revenue was slated for transportation maintenance and improvement projects, including road and bridge repair, sidewalks, transit infrastructure, and various projects in the city’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans. The EHT was set at a modest \$25 per full-time employee per year, but only included employees who drove alone to work (it also exempted small businesses).

Over the nine-year lifespan of the \$365 million property-tax levy Bridging the Gap, the EHT was expected to bring in an extra \$50 million – not enough to buy a fancy new rail line or anything like that, but not chump change either.

Fast forward to 2009, one year into the Great Recession. Councilmembers Richard Conlin and Tim Burgess and Mayor Greg Nickels announced their intention to repeal the EHT. The Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Seattle Association had complained that the tax was hurting Seattle’s business-friendly reputation. Sustainability advocates and groups like Cascade Bicycle Club, meanwhile, wondered why the city would let \$5 million a year in bike,

pedestrian, and transit improvements evaporate into thin air.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, transit advocates lost that battle. In November 2009, the EHT was repealed by the city council.

At the time, Burgess admitted

Every month we wait, we lose millions that could be building a world-class transit system

that \$25 per year per employee wasn’t enough to actually discourage hiring, making the repeal “somewhat symbolic.” For business, maybe, but the progressive revenue that Seattle has forfeited over the past five years is real money, and now our transportation infrastructure is \$30 million worse for the lack of it.

More to the point, if the tax was so small as to be symbolic, why did the Downtown Seattle Association and the Chamber of Commerce lobby so hard to get rid of it? No doubt they saw it as a dangerous precedent, a wedge just begging for someone to come along with a hammer. Its mere existence implied that business should also contribute to the transportation system that allows the wheels of commerce to turn. The recession was the perfect pretext to cry poverty and strangle this baby in its cradle.

Big businesses know the value of our public transit system to their bottom line. They’ll even shell out money to convince voters to swallow more regressive taxes for transit: Amazon, for example, contributed \$25,000 to the campaign for King County’s Proposition 1, which promised to plug Metro’s funding gap with a combination of sales tax and flat car tab fees. Businesses need public transit and they know it. But they don’t want to pay for it.

In April 2014 the county’s Prop 1 went down in flames, despite the best efforts of a broad coalition composed of the DSA, elected officials, labor unions, transit advocates, and social justice groups, as well as the Transit Riders Union. The ball was punted to Seattle to save its bus service.

Enter rookie Councilmember Kshama Sawant, who teamed up with Councilmember Nick Licata to shake things up. Rather than simply rerunning the county’s ballot measure in Seattle, where it had passed handily, they proposed dropping the regressive sales tax hike in favor of two progressive options: a Commercial Parking Tax increase and a new-and-improved

version of the EHT—this time set at a very modest \$18 per worker per year, or less than a penny per hour.

This proposal was voted down 2-6, and Seattle’s Proposition 1 marched onward to the November 2014 ballot in its original form—with unanimous support from the city council, by the way, just to jog the memory of all those now trying to brand Sawant with an inability to compromise.

Something else happened in fall 2014 that affected Seattle’s vote for Prop 1: In a surprising about-face, the King County Council canceled most of its planned bus service cuts, fueling libertarian suspicions that all the talk of deficits had been crying wolf. In fact, the county managed this feat by betting on robust sales tax receipts and changing Metro’s reserve fund policy to shift more money into service. (So we’re all set up for another crisis when the economy tanks again. It won’t, you say? Ha!) But the gamble is paying off so far, leaving Seattle in our current happy position of purchasing new bus service from Metro.

So in spring 2015, with Metro adding service hours for the first time in ages and the Bridging the Gap levy about to expire, all eyes turned toward Move Seattle. The long-overdue transportation improvements it promised to fund inspired little controversy, but the \$930 million price tag caused some consternation. There is debate about how regressive or progressive property taxes shake out to be, and uncertainty as to how voters will respond to the rapid volley of property tax measures coming their way: parks and preschool, transportation, and the Seattle Housing Levy that is likely to double in 2016. And so Licata and Sawant took the opportunity to propose a diversified funding approach, bumping the median property tax bill down from \$275 to \$175 and filling the hole with – you guessed it – Commercial Parking Tax and an EHT.

This second effort to revive the EHT also failed 2-7, but significantly, most councilmembers support it in principle. Even Burgess has said he could support the tax if it’s tied to congestion by requiring employers that bring commuters into high-traffic areas to pay more. Bruce Harrell has also expressed support, and Mike O’Brien has repeatedly stated that it’s not a question of if we use the EHT, only when and what for. The refrain during council discussions was that this tax shouldn’t be used to displace other revenue sources simply because our unmet transit needs run so deep. In the words of Transportation Committee Chair Tom Rasmussen, “We’re going to need all the funding options available to us for transit and transit service.”

I have some sympathy for this line. But when you hear it again and again, it begins to sound a lot like an excuse.

So let’s pass an Employee Hours Tax, and let’s make it good. If \$25 per employee is so trivial as to be symbolic, by all means let’s make it at least \$50. If it was modeled after the Licata-Sawant proposal (which exempted small businesses but included all employees), this would generate nearly \$20 million per year. Or more—\$80 would generate more than \$30 million. And sure, let’s divide the city into congestion zones and make it a tiered charge. The EHT is a flexible tool. One could even tax different industries differently (Amazon, anyone?), if there were good policy reasons to do so.

We could accelerate the build-out of Bus Rapid Transit infrastructure throughout the city, add more bus service hours, strengthen Metro’s poor late-night service network, and stash some cash in reserve for the next economic downturn. Or we could follow San Francisco’s example and start a free bus pass program for low-income youth, seniors, and disabled riders. Possibilities abound.

If this year proves too short a timeframe to actually pass the EHT, at the very least the city council should include a Statement of Legislative Intent in the budget so that consideration is assured for next year. The city is already in the process of studying transportation impact fees on new development, and much of this analysis could be made relevant to an EHT.

Now is the time to act. And what better time than when our city council is about to undergo a major shakeup? Retiring councilmembers have nothing to lose. And for the candidates now in office, what better way to show they are not beholden to the big money lobby groups that may be bankrolling their campaigns than to pass a progressive tax?

Any incumbent running for re-election who doesn’t help pass it doesn’t deserve your vote.

Take Action!
Sign the petition at
transitriders.org

Scrap the Cap: Strengthening Social Security for Future Generations

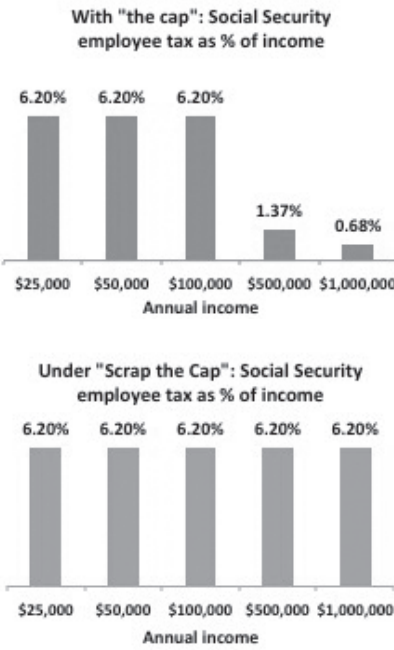
With every paycheck, we contribute to Social Security; so do our employers. That’s how the program is funded. Then when we reach retirement age, incur a disability, or if a breadwinner dies, we are protected by modest but dependable monthly benefits. Maids, mechanics and millionaires – nearly all of us are covered because nearly all of us contribute.

But we don’t all contribute equally. Social Security taxes are collected only on the first \$118,500 of earnings each year. That means high earners – like CEOs and Wall Street executives – pay a lower tax rate than Joe or Jane Worker.

That \$118,500 ceiling known as the “cap” is arbitrary and unfair. If we simply “Scrap the Cap,” requiring Social Security taxes on all earnings, high earners would pay their fair share. That would enable us to strengthen Social Security benefits for future generations.

If we “Scrap the Cap”, millionaires will pay the same tax rate as middle class families, eliminating any concerns about Social Security’s long-term financing. In addition, benefits for current and future retirees could be improved, helping Social Security become an even more effective foundation for keeping seniors, children and families of American workers financially secure.

Social Security represents the best of American values: reward-



ing hard work, honoring our parents, and providing help for those unable to care for themselves. Instead of cutting earned benefits, we can easily protect Social Security for future generations – and expand benefits to those who need them most – if we “Scrap the Cap”. This simple solution will ensure all Americans contribute their fair share to Social Security, and preserve it for future generations.

To learn more about how we can “Scrap the Cap” to improve benefits and strengthen Social Security, visit Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action at www.psara.org or Social Security Works Washington at www.ssworkswa.org, or www.justscrapthecap.com.

FREE FOR STUDENTS: All kids need to get to school

Continued from page 1

walk, due to dangerous traffic or neighborhoods.

Since 2011, Metro fares for youth have risen from \$0.75 to \$1.25 and now to \$1.50, or \$54 for a monthly pass. This is not afford-

able for low-income families. It's time for our city to provide free transportation for all students to get to school!

Take Action!
Sign the petition at
transitriders.org



Students, teachers and staff, transit riders and community supporters rally at Seattle City Hall to urge the city to fund free bus passes for all public school students.



Parents and Educators Speak

I am writing to encourage you to work with Metro and the school district to make sure every high school student in Seattle gets a free, year-round Orca Pass. The current policy of giving passes only during the school year, and only to students who live more than 2.5 miles from their assigned school, is short-sighted and unfair.

My daughter just graduated from NOVA, and my son will start Franklin High School next month. Josie's Orca pass was an invaluable part of her adolescence. It got her to school and back every day, which was great. But more importantly, it gave her the freedom to explore the city, encouraged her to develop independence and responsibility, and exposed her (in a safe, supportive setting) to the full range of humanity that makes up this city. It spared me hours of driving through traffic ferrying her to and from activities – and hours of late-night worrying that she might be riding with a possibly-impaired teenager driver.

My son will not qualify for a free Orca Pass, as we live 2.1 miles from Franklin. The school district's choice, several years ago, to extend the qualifying distance from 1 mile to 2.5 is clearly based on blind budgeting, and not on any rational expectation that it makes sense for Simon to walk 45 minutes to school at 7 am. Simon will need to ride the bus (10 minutes), and I will have to pay his fare.

I will do what it takes to get him an Orca card, because I want him to have the same opportunities and experiences that were so formative for his sister. As a single mother living on a non-profit salary, I will certainly feel this additional cost – and the hassle of having to add funds to the card every month. For other families in our South End neighborhood, I am sure it will be an even greater burden.

Seattle's youth need safe, reliable ways to get to school – and to their jobs, after-school activities, cultural events, and social engagements. Seattle needs young people who can get around without a car, who are comfortable interacting with their neighbors in public spaces, and who understand the value of publicly funded services that improve people's lives. An Orca Pass is an investment in a student's education, and in

Rainier Beach Students Demand Equity

By Ifrah Abshir

"Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are."
– Benjamin Franklin

In 2001, my parents, and my siblings, and I emigrated from Uganda for a better life. We traveled across seas, leaving everything tangible behind, in hopes of an idealistic life abroad. We battled internal pains, suffered tremendous loss, and sold a piece of each of our souls to arrive in the land where dreams come true. Once we got here, we quickly realized the illusions we had seen on pamphlets in Africa were just that, illusions. The promises that were offered were nothing but solid sales pitches.

Traveling to America, we never dared to assume that we would be characterized by the color of our skin. We too had heard the great words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and expected to be judged on the content of our character. In Uganda everyone was the same color, so racial discrimination and prejudice were newfound pains pushed upon us in the United States. Through our everyday struggle of searching for employment and housing, we never expected our skin color would be such a barrier in a country that claimed to be dedicated to "freedom and justice for all".

How naive of us.

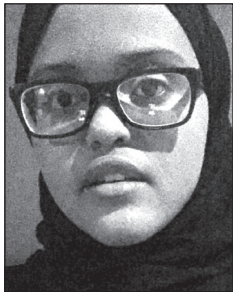
As a black and Muslim immigrant, I could write for days about the ways in which my family has experienced racism in the United States, at both the individual and institutional level. I currently attend Rainier Beach High School. Although Seattle is one of the most homogeneous major cities in the country, with nearly 70% of the population being White, my neighborhood in the South End is very much the opposite. At Beach, we have 95% students of color and over 50 languages spoken. 88% of our students receive free or reduced lunch, meaning the majority of us come from low-income families.

Rainier Beach High School has impressive athletic achievements, such as multiple state championships in Basketball. RBHS achieved the highest graduation rate in the district, and we are seeing a steady upward trend in test scores and

attendance rates. RBHS has been recognized on the national level for our International Baccalaureate (IB) program. Given all of this positive data, one would expect the city and school district to shower Rainier Beach with resources and support. Unfortunately, this has not been the case.

For so long we have been told that there is no funding in the district budget to give RBHS the support it needs. Our school is the only school in the district that has not yet received a full renovation, even though our school was built in 1960. Just last year we had nearly 15 power outages, some of them

causing us to attend school in the dark and cold or even close school for the day. Our school still has chalkboards, whereas schools in Whiter and more affluent neighborhoods have smart boards and other advanced technological tools. Each year, students organize walk outs, protests, attend school board meetings, city hall meetings – but we only receive promises of a new building. Promises that go unfulfilled.



Ifrah Abshir

If a student
cannot afford
\$1.50 a day
for lunch,
why are they
expected to
pay twice as
much for the
bus?

Another public school policy that disproportionately affects low-income students and families is the "Walk-Zone" rule. Seattle Public Schools does not provide school buses to middle or high schools, rather students are expected to use the city Metro buses. The Walk-Zone rule requires high school

students who live within 2.5 miles of their school to walk or pay for their own public transportation. This greatly affects students' attendance rates at Rainier Beach because we don't have the privilege of being driven to school, and many of us do not have access to a car at all. We come from working families, often single-parent homes with multiple kids to support. For someone with younger siblings like me, that means getting siblings to school before continuing on my own walk. I have to wake up hours earlier and it has a negative consequence on my attendance and tardy rates. The cost of a round trip bus ticket to school is \$3.00/day. If a student cannot afford \$1.50 a day for lunch, why are they expected to pay for the bus, which costs twice as much as lunch? Does that make any sense at all?

All these injustices are why I decided to apply for an internship with CDF Freedom Schools this summer at Rainier Beach. As part of National Day of Social Action, we organized a march and rally from Seattle Schools District Office through downtown to Seattle City Hall, a distance of 1.7 miles. It took 40 minutes and that is not even half as far as most students affected by the Walk-Zone travel in a day to get to and from school.

We held Harambee in City Hall Plaza. Harambee is a Swahili word meaning 'Let's pull together' where we sing, dance and cheer. We were joined in solidarity by many community members and organizations such as the Transit Riders Union. Scholars made speeches and gave personal testimonies of the violence and sexual harassment they have encountered on their long walks to school. We demanded ORCA bus passes and a new school building.

The Mayor of Seattle, Ed Murray, came and addressed us. He spoke a sweet talk – however, we all know that talk is just talk. We want the Walk-Zone policy and all inequitable policies to change. We don't just want a building renovation, we want a renovation inside the hearts and souls of the people we ELECTED to represent us. Until those things are achieved, we will be here on the front lines fighting.

We are Rainier Beach, we are Freedom Fighters, we are people of color, we are immigrants, we are youth – our voices MATTER and boy are we loud.

their future as citizens. Current policy denies some students access to this investment. Please work with Metro and SPS to extend it to all students!

– Mikala

Every day at least one student comes to my office asking for a bus token to get home. Our stock of these only lasted until November, so now I have to tell the students "no" or I give them money from my wallet so they do not have to walk 30 minutes in the dark/cold/rain. Many of these same students have truancy issues that are related to the barriers they face in getting to school.

– Chelsea Gallegos, Social Worker & Graduation Success Coordinator, Rainier Beach High School

I am a fixed, low-income, disabled, single parent. My nine-year-old daughter takes classes four days per week in addition to Seattle Public School. The three of us live on my disability check of \$733.00 per month. In the last few years my rent has increased by a quarter of my household income, displacing the budget we had for food after our food stamps run out each month. Every time I take my child on the bus, or a volunteer helper takes her, it costs me two bus fares, not one. I have called many charities for help, but none seem to recognize children's bus fare as a priority or a hardship. Now we are bearing the additional cost of a double fare increase, one for me and one for her.

– J. Davis

Ask a Bus Driver

By Sam Smith

How come there are some bus drivers who will kick you off the bus if you are a quarter short on bus fare, and other drivers don't care if you pay at all? What are the actual rules?
— Willie, West Seattle

When I was in training for the job, in a class with 20 other soon-to-be Metro operators, our instructor repeated this mantra: “Don’t enforce the fare.” Simply put, this is the fare enforcement policy for Metro bus drivers. If a rider underpays or doesn’t pay fare, we can choose to inform them of the fare, but not command or even ask them to pay. If the rider chooses not to pay after that, then so be it. Keep on driving.

Many of us were understandably surprised and confused by this policy. Isn’t that a flawed business model, one that encourages non-payment? Metro’s logic is pretty straightforward: About 90% of all assaults on bus drivers result from fare disputes. To send the message home, they even handed us copies of a news article about a New York City bus driver who was murdered after asking a rider to pay. The message I got was that \$2.50 is not worth dying over.

I believe it actually does make good business sense for Metro to have this policy. However much money Metro loses from fare evasion pales in comparison to the associated legal, medical, and administrative expenses of on-the-job violence against its employees.

So if this is the policy, then why is there such inconsistency between bus drivers in its implementation? Because we are each unique, fabulous human beings, doing a physically and emotionally trying job, all alone. We each develop routines, rhythms, and habits to make the job endurable. We absorb a lot of riders’ stress and anger, and it becomes very easy to internalize and take things personally. When you don’t pay your fare, even though rationally I know that it has nothing to do with me, it feels like a personal affront.

In these instances, I take a moment to center myself, remember that it’s not meant as a personal insult, and let it slide without saying anything. If for no other reason, I don’t want to argue about fares because it wastes time, and as regular readers of this column know, I value my bathroom breaks above all else!

As a longtime transit rider, I also know what it’s like from the other side, where coming up with a few bucks to get around town can be challenging or prohibitive. I’ve definitely underpaid, sneaked aboard, and used invalid transfers before, so this experience gives me some perspective and sympathy. I strongly believe that riding public transportation should be as accessible and welcoming as possible.

But I assure you that we know all the tricks and tactics for getting aboard without paying. Here are some of my favorites:

- “Can I get a lift? I only have twenties,” as rider shows me a wad of large bills.

- “Let me find my transfer,” said while looking over my shoulder to see today’s transfer letter and color so they can fish out the right match from their collection.

- I am presented with a transfer that is folded or crinkled in a manner that skews the expiration time or letter of the day.

- Rider holds wallet up to the ORCA reader and proceeds down the aisle. There was definitely no card in that wallet.

- “I lost my transfer. Can I have a new one?”

And those are just some of the good ones! I share this not to shame you about cheating the system. If it’s not a low-income person sneaking through the backdoor of a bus, it’s a billionaire creating a fake business in the Cayman Islands to avoid paying taxes. My point is that bus drivers often know when you’re pulling a fast one on us. So it’s not a matter of outsmarting the driver, but rather a matter of whether the driver wants to spend their time confronting you about it.

Does this policy encourage a pervasive culture of fare nonpayment? In my experience, hardly. While I’m sure many people abuse this le-

niency, and nonpaying riders definitely stand out from the rhythmically obedient ORCA payers, they make up a very minute percentage of the riding public. If anything, there is a culture of overzealous fare payment, not evasion.

With all this in mind, here are my suggestions for riding Metro if you can’t afford bus fare:

Be polite but know your rights! Be respectful to the driver – remember that this person has been laboring away, sometimes for more than twelve hours! Work with them – don’t try to outsmart them. It won’t work with every driver, but my hunch is that you’re likelier to be granted a ride with much less conflict if you are upfront about your situation. Try something like “I’m really sorry but I only have 75¢, may I please have a ride?” If your trip requires a transfer, then ask for one as well. This demonstrates courtesy and appreciation to your driver that will hopefully be reciprocated. You shouldn’t be denied a ride just because you can’t afford it. That being said, even if you’re being treated unjustly, please don’t start a fight. Remember that your driver

has a high-stress job and is trying to balance multiple things simultaneously. Yelling at them won’t help the situation.

A special exception in the Metro system is RapidRide, where bus drivers are not the final word on fare payment. On these lines, you can pay the driver as on any oth-

paper transfer or an ORCA card. If you ask the driver for a courtesy ride, make sure to obtain a transfer, otherwise you run the risk of a hefty fine from the FEOs.

I don’t want you to come away thinking that you now have license never to pay bus fare again. While it’s true that less than a quarter of Metro’s budget comes from bus fare, that is still about \$146 million each year. Without this revenue, bus service would be cut drastically. If you can afford it, please pay your fare. But if the only money you have in the world is jingling around in your pocket, I personally would rather you save it for your next meal rather than draining it for a brief bus ride. Please pay if you can, and let me know if you can’t.

And as always, thanks for riding!

What burning questions have you always wanted to ask a bus driver? Send them my way! sam@transitriders.org



er bus, but you can also board through a rear door if you’re carrying a transfer or have tapped your ORCA card outside. Fare enforcement officers (FEOs) randomly board these buses asking for proof of payment, in the form of either a

Letters to the Editor

Dear Transit Readers!

In the January 2015 issue, you had an excellent illuminative article by Susan Koppelman on the new “Evil Empire,” Veolia, an octipodal enterprise that grabs in its tentacles organizations that provide public services at reasonable prices and pay their workers decent, negotiated wages, maybe making low or no profit in so doing.

Once Veolia seizes these preys, it cuts services and wages to bare bones levels, raises prices (fares) and thereby makes a profit to the detriment of the public and their workers.

Before it started to infest the US, it established its evil practices in Europe, including Germany, where I lived from 1968 to 2014 and encountered this octipodal monster first-hand. There it bought up rail lines too uneconomic for state railroads (especially those seeking to privatize) and drastically cut wages on them to make these profitable for (only) themselves.

The Federal railroads contributed to this by concentrating on high-speed, long-distance lines and closing or cutting services on local, especially rural, routes and/or selling them to Veolia and similar vultures. People in the Northeast “Bos-Wash” corridor of the US fear something like this as Amtrak focuses on its “Acela” High-Speed-Rail line there, which is highly competitive on city-center to city-center routes compared to the city-center-to-airports-to-city-center airline services. This could leave local services at the “mercy” of Veolia.

Veolia’s tentacles in the

Northeast have already seized Boston’s school bus services. And done with these in a new “Boston Massacre” what it has done elsewhere: cutting wages, locking out union members, and firing four of the union’s leaders in October 2013. As support for their reinstatement grew, Veolia in June 2014 manufactured four felony charges against them. Two have since been dismissed. They were intended to break the back of this majority-Hatian- and Cape Verdian-member union.

Here in Seattle, Veolia’s tentacles have already seized Metro’s “Access” buses, as Ms. Koppelman’s excellent article details. And we have all just seen that “Access” fares have gone up 50 cents, while other Metro fares increase 25 cents.

Cut Veolia’s tentacles before they seize more of Seattle and the USA!!

— Win Hutton

Why are we homeless? Capitalism. We are the people who are not wanted by business. Some of us are too stupid, and others are too smart. Some of us are too ugly or too old. Not too old to work, just too old to be wanted by business. Not all of us are considered convenient by business. So we are left to just go die. That’s capitalism, and it’s time for a serious national conversation about it. And it’s time to stop worshipping capitalism like sacred cow and see it for what it is: a cultural choice about who gets to have power over whether other people live or die.

— An anonymous Nickelodeon

Destinations: Interlaken Boulevard and Park

Route 43, Route 49

Interlaken Boulevard is one of those hidden places, but loved by those in the know. I first discovered the area while on an outing with the Sierra Club back in the late 1970s. It was a stormy November Saturday. We were park-hopping around Seattle and stopped here, dodging flying leaves and branches. What is most striking about this area is the feeling that, despite the presence of houses, you are somewhere else, way up in the mountains. Even the noise of the traffic on the 520 Freeway could be a distant waterfall.

The route starts at Roanoke Park, a pretty neighborhood park of grass and islands of flowers, worth a walk-through. From here cross over to the south side of E. Roanoke St. and follow it east along the greenway of 520. Two blocks after crossing over the freeway come to E. Delmar, which becomes E. Interlaken Blvd. Parts of the route are open to local car traffic, but due to the nature of the road, which winds around the heads of several ravines, this should not be a problem.

In a while you will spot a stone marker on the right (west) side. It was placed by the Washington Women’s Pioneer Auxiliary in honor of Louisa Boren in 1914. Louisa was married to David Denny, and their homestead included the land around the Seattle Center. Louisa was the last survivor of the pioneer group that landed at Alki Beach in 1851 on the Schooner Exact, the official founders of Seattle.

Soon after the marker, you’ll spot what looks like a driveway. This is the continuation of the route. The arterial continues as Interlaken Dr. E. Two blocks down the “drive” is 19th Ave E. The route continues straight ahead and is now a car-free trail. The sense of peaceful remoteness is most evident here. Along the whole route trails branch off up or down several of the ravines, offering additional walking pleasure. Eventually the trail ends and continues as a street a short distance to 24th Ave E., and the end of the route.

GET THERE: Metro Route 49, jumping off at E. Roanoke (Roanoke Park), or for the southern end Metro Route 43, jumping off on 24th Ave E. at Boyer and walk back south to E. Interlaken Blvd. — Pauline Van Senus

