



Legislation Text

File #: Res 31921, Version: 3

CITY OF SEATTLE

RESOLUTION _____

A RESOLUTION stating the City Council’s intent to consider legislation in 2020 that would expand Chapter 14.30 of the Seattle Municipal Code to require employers to provide employees with transit subsidies, and to consult with City of Seattle departments and relevant stakeholders in the development of such legislation and related policies.

WHEREAS, climate change is a defining crisis of our times, calling for urgent and decisive action by

governments, businesses, and individuals; and

WHEREAS, the Seattle Climate Action Plan, adopted in 2013, establishes the goal that Seattle reach zero net

greenhouse gas emissions by 2050; and

WHEREAS, in August 2019 the City Council (“Council”) unanimously passed, and the Mayor signed,

Resolution 31895 calling for a Green New Deal, including the goal of making Seattle climate pollution-free by 2030; and

WHEREAS, the most recent report from the Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment shows that

Seattle’s greenhouse gas emissions rose from 2014 to 2016 by 2.5 percent, including a one percent increase in pollution from passenger vehicles, moving Seattle further away from its climate goals; and

WHEREAS, according to the April 2018 Seattle Climate Action Plan update, 50 percent of Seattle’s greenhouse

gas emissions were from passenger transportation; and

WHEREAS, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation, on average, commuting by single-occupancy

vehicle produces over twice the greenhouse gas emissions of riding public transit; and

WHEREAS, according to the Seattle Department of Transportation’s 2018 Traffic Report, 51 percent of Seattle

commutes were drive-alone trips in 2017; and

WHEREAS, the 2015 Move Seattle Plan states, “Decisive action to meet our goal of 75% of commuters getting to work without their personal cars by 2035 is needed to keep us on track to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050”; and

WHEREAS, the “Seattle Squeeze,” a period from 2019 until 2024 when downtown Seattle will experience massive construction and redevelopment, is expected to create particularly challenging traffic conditions over five years, making it even more urgent to replace drive-alone trips with more space-efficient modes such as public transit; and

WHEREAS, multiple studies indicate that employers can significantly influence their employees’ commute choices through measures such as providing subsidized transit passes, which reduces drive-alone commuting and increases transit use; and

WHEREAS, The City of Seattle’s Commute Trip Reduction program, a partnership between the City, State, and Seattle’s employers, works primarily with a specific category of employers-those with at least 100 full time employees arriving at a single worksite between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m.-to reduce drive-alone commuting to those worksites; and

WHEREAS, many large employers do not fall under the Commute Trip Reduction program, although their employees’ commutes may still contribute significantly to traffic congestion, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions; and

WHEREAS, the Commute Trip Reduction program does not currently have the capacity to work with a much broader range of employers to reduce drive-alone commuting; and

WHEREAS, in August 2019 the Council unanimously passed, and the Mayor signed, a 2019-2023 Commute Trip Reduction Strategic Plan that establishes drive-alone commuting rate goals for “network areas” throughout Seattle, with an overall goal of achieving a 25 percent drive-alone commuting rate for Seattle by 2035; and

WHEREAS, in recent years Seattle voters have repeatedly approved major investments in transit infrastructure

and service, including establishment of the Seattle Transportation Benefit District in 2014, the Move Seattle Levy in 2015, and the Sound Transit 3 ballot measure in 2016; and

WHEREAS, in October 2018 the Council unanimously passed, and the Mayor signed, Ordinance 125684 (“Commuter Benefits Ordinance”), enacted by the City as Chapter 14.30 of the Seattle Municipal Code, requiring certain employers with 20 or more employees worldwide to offer employees the opportunity to use pre-tax earnings to purchase commuter benefits other than parking, such as transit and vanpool expenses; and

WHEREAS, the Commuter Benefits Ordinance will become effective January 1, 2020; and

WHEREAS, the Puget Sound Regional Council’s 2017 Household Travel Survey showed that higher income households were more likely to be offered free or subsidized transit than low income households, concluding that “higher income households are more likely to have additional transportation benefits such as subsidized transit and parking, which may compound income inequality”; and

WHEREAS, the Pew Charitable Trusts reported in 2016 that lower-income households spend a far greater share of their income on transportation than higher income households; and

WHEREAS, the Brookings Institution reported in 2015 that the typical commute distance for the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue area is nine miles and that lower-income workers have less proximity to nearby jobs; and

WHEREAS, the University of Washington Evans School of Public Affairs reported in 2014 that 40 percent of those working in Seattle and earning minimum wage live outside Seattle, and that low wages are more likely among women and people of color; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEATTLE THAT:

Section 1. The City Council (“Council”) intends to consider legislation in 2020 that would expand the Commuter Benefits Ordinance, Chapter 14.30 of the Seattle Municipal Code, to require employers to provide employees with transit subsidies, while taking into consideration the differing abilities of employers to absorb

these costs and administer the transit subsidies based on the number of employees and other factors that could include the personnel

resources available to administer the transit subsidies, the displacement risks facing the employer's organization or business, and other factors indicating or impacting the financial wellbeing of the employer's organization or business.

A. The legislation should provide employers with a variety of methods for compliance while also ensuring that the transit subsidies are easily accessible to employees.

B. The legislation should incorporate race and social justice principles and reflect the application of a Racial Equity Toolkit to determine how requirements would impact employers and employees.

Section 2. The Council should consult with the Office of Labor Standards and relevant stakeholders, including employers and employees, in the development of the legislation.

Section 3. The Council should consult with the Human Services Department, and other City of Seattle departments to develop solutions to ensure transit benefits can be provided to employees of City of Seattle contractors.

Section 4. The Council should consult with non-profits to develop solutions for providing transit benefits to employees.

Adopted by the City Council the _____ day of _____, 2019, and signed by me in open session in authentication of its adoption this _____ day of _____, 2019.

President _____ of the City Council

Filed by me this _____ day of _____, 2019.

Monica Martinez Simmons, City Clerk

(Seal)