

CITY OF SEATTLE
ORDINANCE 126115
COUNCIL BILL 119833

AN ORDINANCE relating to a sales and use tax; providing for the submission to qualified electors of the City at an election to be held on November 3, 2020, a proposition to collect a sales and use tax to fund transit and related transportation programs in Seattle.

WHEREAS, the Revised Code of Washington (RCW), Chapter 36.73, provides for the establishment of transportation benefit districts by cities and counties and authorizes those districts to levy and impose various taxes and fees to generate revenues to support transportation improvements that benefit the district and that are consistent with state, regional, or local transportation plans and necessitated by existing or reasonably foreseeable congestion levels; and

WHEREAS, City of Seattle Ordinance 123397 created the Seattle Transportation Benefit District for preserving and maintaining transportation infrastructure, improving public safety, implementing elements of the Seattle Transportation Strategic Plan and other planning documents, investing in bicycle, pedestrian, freight mobility and transit enhancements, and providing people with choices to meet their mobility needs; and

WHEREAS, in STBD Resolution 12, the Governing Board of the STBD submitted a ballot measure (“STBD Proposition 1”) to the qualified electors of the STBD to authorize up to a 0.1 percent sales and use tax and an annual vehicle license fee of up to an additional \$60 per registered vehicle with a \$20 rebate for low-income individuals, for the purposes of funding additional transit service in Seattle for a six-year term expiring on December 31, 2020; and

1 WHEREAS, on November 4, 2014, STBD Proposition 1 was approved by a majority of qualified
2 electors of the STBD; and

3 WHEREAS, on December 1, 2014, in STBD Resolution 14, the Governing Board of the STBD
4 imposed the revenue measures authorized by the voters through the approval of STBD
5 Proposition 1; and

6 WHEREAS, on July 8, 2016, by Ordinance 125070, The City of Seattle assumed the rights,
7 powers, immunities, functions, and obligations of the STBD as authorized under RCW
8 36.74.030; and

9 WHEREAS, The City of Seattle, having assumed the powers of the Seattle Transportation
10 Benefit District, has the authority to seek voter approval for the Council to enact up to a
11 0.2 percent sales and use tax for transportation improvements under RCW 82.14.0455;
12 and

13 WHEREAS, on June 29, 2018, by Ordinance 125606, The City of Seattle authorized material
14 scope changes to STBD Proposition 1, including provisions to provide transit passes to
15 Seattle Public School students, expanding the ORCA Opportunity Program and
16 authorizing capital improvements to improve transit speed and reliability; and

17 WHEREAS, since passage of STBD Proposition 1 in 2014, The City of Seattle has been able to
18 expand bus service by over 8,000 new weekly trips, make bus service more reliable and
19 increase access to very frequent (ten minutes or better) bus service within a ten-minute
20 walk from 25 percent of households in 2015 to 70 percent in 2019; and

21 WHEREAS, STBD funded transit equity and access initiatives provided ORCA Opportunity
22 cards to 15,000 Seattle public high school students and Promise Scholars, 500 income-
23 qualified middle school students, and 1,500 Seattle Housing Authority residents; and

1 WHEREAS, voters statewide approved Initiative 976 in spite of 76 percent of voters in Seattle
2 rejecting this Tim Eyman measure intended to undermine Seattle’s transit needs; and

3 WHEREAS, The City of Seattle joined other parties in challenging the constitutionality of I-976,
4 including its repeal of Vehicle License Fee authority under RCW 82.80.140; and

5 WHEREAS, the City’s legal authority to fix, impose, and extend up to a one hundred dollar
6 vehicle license fee under RCW 82.80.140 with approval of a majority of City voters has
7 been thrown into question by statewide passage of I-976 which, in part, attempts to repeal
8 this authority, potentially in an unconstitutional manner; and

9 WHEREAS, access to transit provides mobility to essential workers as they perform essential
10 functions to combat the COVID-19 emergency; and

11 WHEREAS, the City wishes to maintain sufficient transit service and access to opportunity made
12 possible by Proposition 1, while also facilitating COVID-19 response and the recovery of
13 the economy with mobility for essential workers, job seekers, students, and others who
14 will continue to rely on transit, and while also mitigating impacts from the closure of the
15 West Seattle Bridge; and

16 WHEREAS, the Reconnect West Seattle strategy has a goal of shifting transit mode share in
17 West Seattle from 17 percent to 30 percent to manage congestion during the closure of
18 the West Seattle High Bridge; and

19 WHEREAS, because of the importance of the regional public transit network in promoting
20 equitable transit access in communities throughout King County, the City of Seattle
21 supports future efforts to enact a countywide transit funding measure that incorporates
22 transit service and access opportunities for Seattle residents in accordance with the equity
23 and sustainability principles detailed in the King County Mobility Framework, and the

1 City intends to work with King County in partnership on a future transit measure that
2 could be approved by countywide voters, thereby allowing the City to consolidate or
3 phase-out this funding measure; and

4 WHEREAS, in the meantime, King County Metro has agreed to continue partnering with The
5 City of Seattle in providing expanded transit service to Seattle residents through renewal
6 of service purchase agreements it entered with the City following passage of STBD
7 Proposition 1 in 2014; and

8 WHEREAS, if Initiative 976 is overturned, the Seattle City Council and Mayor have the
9 authority to increase the existing annual \$20 vehicle license fee to \$40 and then, after 24
10 months, by another \$10 to \$50; and

11 WHEREAS, in 2019, SDOT invested approximately \$3.4 million for first-last mile pilot projects
12 including \$1 million for Ride2 in West Seattle and \$2.4 million for VIA in South Seattle;
13 and

14 WHEREAS, Sales Taxes and Vehicle License Fees are regressive taxes that disproportionately
15 burden poor and working-class people, especially communities of color; and

16 WHEREAS, public transit like Metro is an essential component of the Green New Deal; and

17 WHEREAS, Developer Impact Fees could be established as early as 2021 to increase funding to
18 buy bus service hours from Metro; and

19 WHEREAS, Developer Impact Fees are a progressive funding source paid for by large,
20 corporate developers; and

21 WHEREAS, the Seattle City Council intends to complete in 2020 any required SEPA analysis to
22 enable Developer Impact Fees to be enacted in 2021; and

1 WHEREAS, the Seattle City Council is committed to enacting Developer Impact Fees in 2021 to
2 raise not less than \$44 million which would allow Seattle to increase funding for Metro
3 bus hours; and

4 WHEREAS, in response to public requests that the City pursue progressive sources of revenue to
5 supplement the STBD, the City Council intends to consider imposing a transportation
6 development impact fee under RCW 36.73 or RCW 82.02, which could fund necessary
7 capital and other transportation investments that support transit capacity; and

8 WHEREAS, SDOT intends to conduct a Race and Social Justice analysis to inform the City
9 Council in consideration of future STBD spending decisions in the City’s annual budget
10 process to focus on the needs of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and benefit these
11 and other historically underserved communities, including low-income households,
12 people with disabilities and other priority populations identified in SDOT’s
13 Transportation Equity program; NOW, THEREFORE,

14 **BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY OF SEATTLE AS FOLLOWS:**

15 Section 1. The City submits to the qualified electors of the City of Seattle a proposition to
16 authorize up to a 0.15 percent sales and use tax for a term ending April 1, 2027, which is six
17 years from the date upon which the state Department of Revenue would commence collections
18 on the tax authorized by approval of this measure. This sales and use tax replaces the \$60
19 Vehicle License Fee and 0.1 percent sales and use tax first authorized by Seattle voters in 2014
20 for a six-year term expiring at the end of 2020. If approved by voters, the revenues will be used
21 solely for the purpose of maintaining transit service and access to frequent transit service for
22 Seattle neighborhoods, students and low income individuals, including associated maintenance
23 and capital improvements that serve efficient operation of transit service; emerging mobility

1 needs to support COVID-19 recovery and the Reconnect West Seattle strategy to mitigate the
2 ongoing closure of the West Seattle High Bridge; community-led oversight; and continuation of
3 programs to increase transit access for low income residents, seniors and students.

4 Section 2. Use of revenues. The funds raised by this proposition (“Proposition 1
5 revenues”) will be used solely for the transit and transportation purposes as described in this
6 ordinance and associated administrative costs. Proposition 1 revenues will first be used to pay
7 any required administrative costs to the state Department of Revenue and elections costs.

8 Remaining Proposition 1 revenues will be used to fund:

9 A. Service hours on King County Metro operated services with more than 65 percent of
10 stops within Seattle, consistent with the Seattle Transit Master Plan and King County Metro
11 Transit’s Service Guidelines, or any King County Metro operated route serving historically low-
12 income communities in Seattle; and

13 B. King County Metro transit service hours on current and future RapidRide lines
14 serving Seattle, identified in the Seattle Transit Master Plan and King County Metro’s long-range
15 plan (Metro CONNECTS); and

16 C. Up to 10 million dollars of the Proposition 1 revenues may be used annually to support
17 the implementation, management, and administration of programs to support transit access by
18 low income residents, workers, seniors and youth, including the ORCA Opportunity program,
19 which provides transit passes for Seattle Public Schools students in grades K-12, as well as
20 students participating in the Seattle Promise scholarship or other similar programs at Seattle
21 colleges and universities, along with programs targeted to seniors and public housing residents.

22 These funds may be used to provide transit passes, for low income medical workers, healthcare

1 workers, first responders, pharmacy workers, grocery store workers, and other workers deemed
2 essential by any state order (“Essential Workers”) such as the COVID-19 civil emergency; and

3 D. Up to 9 million dollars of the Proposition 1 revenues may be used in 2021, and up to 3
4 million dollars annually in the following years, to support infrastructure maintenance and capital
5 improvements to maximize the efficiency of transit operations, including enhancements to transit
6 speed, passenger amenities, transit street pavement maintenance, and reliability of transit service
7 operated by King County Metro within the City of Seattle; and

8 E. Up to 9 million dollars of the Proposition 1 revenues may be used annually to support
9 emerging mobility needs related to COVID-19 response and recovery, and closure of the West
10 Seattle High Bridge. Such investments could include transit service, speed and reliability
11 improvements, first-last mile transit connections, and Transportation Demand Management
12 strategies described in the community-driven Reconnect West Seattle plan. These funds may also
13 be used throughout the six-year term to support or pilot innovative partnerships with King
14 County Metro.

15 Section 3. In addition to the restrictions on the use of revenues in Section 2, the combined
16 yearly expenditures for Section 2(A) and 2(B) shall be a majority of the yearly expenditures of
17 Proposition 1 revenues beginning in 2022 and thereafter.

18 Section 4. No supplanting of existing funding for transit service. Before funding any
19 transit service, the City anticipates that there will be an interlocal agreement with King County
20 Metro to provide that the Proposition 1 revenues will not supplant other funding for any routes
21 partially or completely operating within Seattle that King County Metro would otherwise provide
22 in accordance with the Seattle Transit Master Plan, and King County Metro’s Transit Service
23 Guidelines and long-range plan (Metro CONNECTS).

1 Section 5. Oversight. The City shall issue an annual report to the public that describes
2 King County Metro’s provision of transit service in Seattle and countywide, including service
3 funded by Proposition 1 revenues and whether supplantation has occurred. The report will also
4 analyze the impacts of service reductions, increases or changes approved by the Metropolitan
5 King County Council or King County Metro in Seattle.

6 The community-led Seattle Transit Advisory Board will continue to serve as the public
7 oversight committee charged with advising on spending of Proposition 1 revenues.
8 Appointments to the Transit Advisory Board, the scope of its duties, and reporting requirements
9 shall continue to be consistent with Resolution 31572, as adopted by Council in 2015, following
10 passage of the 2014 Transportation Benefit District measure.

11 Section 6. Election – Ballot title. The City Council directs the City Clerk to file this
12 ordinance with the Director of Elections of King County, Washington, as ex officio supervisor of
13 elections, requesting the Director of Elections to call and conduct a special election in
14 conjunction with the state general election to be held on November 3, 2020, for the purpose of
15 submitting to the qualified electors of the City the proposition set forth in this ordinance.

16 The City Clerk is directed to certify to the King County Director of Elections the ballot
17 title approved by the City Attorney in accordance with the City Attorney’s responsibilities under
18 RCW 29A.36.071 and RCW 29A.72.050. The following ballot title containing a statement of
19 subject and concise description are submitted to the City Attorney for consideration:

20 CITY OF SEATTLE

21 PROPOSITION NO. 1

22 The City of Seattle’s Proposition 1 concerns funding for transit and related transportation
23 needs in Seattle.

1 If approved, this proposition authorizes up to a 0.15% sales and use tax expiring April 1,
2 2027, and as proposed in Ordinance _____, to replace the current voter-approved 0.1%
3 sales tax, expiring December 31, 2020.

4 Revenues are dedicated to: transit services benefitting Seattle residents, including
5 frequent transit network maintenance and associated capital improvements; low-income
6 fare programs for Seattle seniors, students, workers, and residents; and transportation
7 needs related to COVID-19 recovery and the West Seattle Bridge closure.

8

9 Should this proposition be approved?

10 Yes___

11 No ___

12 Those in favor shall vote “Yes”; those opposed shall mark their ballots “No”.

13

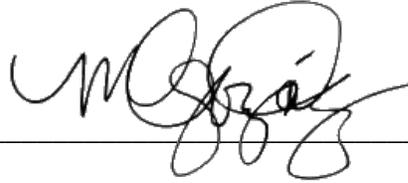
14 Section 7. Severability. The provisions of this ordinance are declared to be separate and
15 severable. The invalidity of any clause, sentence, paragraph, subdivision, section, or portion of
16 this ordinance, or the invalidity of its application to any person or circumstance, does not affect
17 the validity of the remainder of this ordinance or the validity of its application to other persons or
18 circumstances.

19 Section 8. Effectiveness. Those portions of this ordinance providing for the submission of
20 a ballot proposition to the voters shall take effect and be in force immediately upon its approval
21 by the Mayor.

1 Passed by the City Council the 27th day of July, 2020,

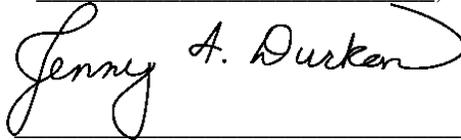
2 and signed by me in open session in authentication of its passage this 27th day of

3 July, 2020.

4 

5 President _____ of the City Council

6 Approved by me this 31st day of July, 2020.

7 

8 Jenny A. Durkan, Mayor

9 Filed by me this 31st day of July, 2020.

10 

11 Monica Martinez Simmons, City Clerk

12 (Seal)