

April 27, 2016

The Honorable Marilyn Strickland
Mayor, City of Tacoma
Vice-Chair, Sound Transit Board
747 Market St
Tacoma WA 98402

RE: Tacoma Link Fares

Dear Mayor Strickland:

The Downtown Merchants Group has been on board (I couldn't resist) with and supportive of Sound Transit's Link Light Rail since its inception. We've worked together to help downtown businesses and their customers negotiate construction and then learn to use the newest piece in a growing transit system. Together we developed an innovative and award-winning PR campaign to help the process. In fact, I was president of the DMG when we watched state and local officials cut the ribbon on the brand-new system, and I was honored to say a few words at the historic event.

We are frequently your voice on the street as system users and potential users share questions, concerns, complaints and accolades directly with us on a daily basis. We do our best to tell your story/our story well.

We also understand the fragile economy of downtown business and the particular fragility of those street-level businesses (retail, coffee shops, museums, performing arts, restaurants) that keep the lights on, the sidewalks full and the downtown core alive. Retail is still in the midst of a very slow recovery and our clients are extremely sensitive to costs.

And yes, we also recognize that along with no free lunch, there's no free ride either, and at some point riding the Link will cost each rider directly. Unfortunately, the addition of a fee at this time coincides with a number of other new costs to doing business in Tacoma: higher minimum wage, paid leave, and possibly restrictions and fees on the use of plastic bags. These may be all good

things in/and of themselves, but they do become another cost which will either cut further into already small margins or be passed along as higher prices to consumers, another issue in a fragile and competitive field.

We urge the City and Sound Transit to delay that time a bit longer and to find a third party to absorb the proposed fees for ridership. We are concerned that adding a fee at a time when patronage growing slowly and the consumer climate is still delicate will result in a serious drop in ridership and become another stumbling block to clients the redevelopment of downtown Tacoma.

Sincerely,

Phyllis Harrison, President, Downtown Merchants Group
Co-owner, LeRoy Jewelers & The Art Stop